Putting the money where the mouth is/hands are: Icelandic Sign Language and the UNDRIP

Helen Koulidobrova, elena.koulidobrova@ccsu.edu
Rannveig Sverrisdóttir, rannsve@hi.is

ABSTRACT: The paper discusses an endangered indigenous sign language of Iceland—íslenskt táknmál, ÍTM. Unlike other indigenous endangered languages (e.g. Sámi), or other sign languages (e.g. American Sign Language, ASL), ÍTM has received certain recognition typically associated with equitable language policy. However, we further show that as a country that has committed itself to linguistic equality as well as support of indigenous languages under the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous People (UNDRIP 2007), Iceland still has a way to go—both in terms of language attitudes and the associated policy implementations. We analyze the current situation, explain the reason for the state of affairs by contextualizing the revitalization barrier, and offer an explicit path forward which articulates the responsibilities of the power structures as well as potential outcomes related to revitalization, should these responsibilities be fulfilled.

Keywords: UNDRIP; Sign Language; audism; Deaf; language policy; bilingualism

1. Background
1.1. Sign languages in the context of indigenous minority languages, not simply minority languages

In the past 40 years, many researchers have argued that Deaf and Hard of Hearing (DHH) communities should be viewed as socio-cultural and socio-political spaces. One term encompassing these communities is DEAF\^WORLD (Reagan 1985, et seq; Padden & Humphries 1988, et seq., and many others), another is ‘Sign Language Peoples’ (Batterbury et al. 2007, et seq.). The former makes direct reference to the culture of Deafness; the latter to the language that has arisen within these communities (though of course, sign languages are also used by hearing people — the point to which we will return). Whichever term is being utilized, vast literature has demonstrated that this community is clearly minoritized in the similar manner we find other oppressed groups to be; this is true in every country DHH people / Sign Language Peoples (SLP) reside; their languages are minority languages, irrespective of whether they actually hold this status formally (DeMeulder et al. 2019 and references therein). Note, for instance: 9/22/20, the Office of the High Commissioner of the Human Rights at the United Nations, in the person of the F. de Varennes, a Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues, has once again voiced its support for Sign Languages as fully fledged languages, with “their own rich cultures and identities and
are entitled to the full range of human rights as *members of a linguistic minority*” (highlights are ours, https://www.ohchr.org/).

However, one other aspect tends to be overlooked in this literature: some (though not all) of these languages are also autochthonous to the land where they are used. This is true, for instance, of the language under discussion in this paper -- Icelandic Sign Language, previous labeled *indigenous language* in the literature (Hilmarsson-Dunn & Kristinsson 2010); that is to say that the community using the sign language is in fact indigenous in terms of (1) below, from the International Labor Organization (ILO):

(1) a. existing in independent “social, cultural and economic conditions [that] distinguish them from other sections of the national community, whose status is regulated wholly or partially by their own customs or traditions or by special laws or regulations; and
b. ... regarded as indigenous on account of their descent from the populations which inhabited the country, or geographical region to which the country belongs, at the time of conquest or colonization” (Article 1.1, ILO Convention 169).

Ordinarily, such framing has usually been used for spoken languages only, such as Mohawk and Hawaiian in the USA, Cree in Canada, Evenki in Russia, Sámi in Sweden, and so forth—that is, the languages of the peoples that have been argued to pre-date the current dominant socio-linguistic structures on a particular territory (English and Russian, respectively). Two main types of issues can be broadly identified: land/sovereignty rights of the people and the endangerment of the language/culture under the dominance of another. Historically, the former often involve some sort of direct action, such as the Alta Conflict of the 1970s, Standing Rock of the 2017-2019, i.a., as well as recognition-based acts, such as the Sámi Act in Norway (1987) (see Eide 2001 for a discussion). Arguably, many language revitalization efforts have stemmed from these actions. Yet, the type of support from the top any given country provides via legislature as well as its implementation also speaks to the commitment of the country to the change in the status of the (typically) marginalized indigenous languages. The academic, as well as the community, discourse on the topic diverges in two directions: language attitudes, which are bound to the inextricably connected to the belief systems about the community that uses that language, and language policies (Hinton et al. 2018).

But utilizing the aforementioned structure, one could say the same of sign languages (SLs) as well. While in terms of SLs and their people, the land-based argument may not always hold, but all the rest of the features of indigeneity have been demonstrated; see extensive discussions in Reagan (1985), Padden & Humphries (1988), Lane 1992, Batterbury et al. (2007). This is because, aside from the discussion of Deafness and the geopolitical spaces it occupies, many sign languages are, quite simply, native to their land, and the cultures in which these languages are used are both indigenous to the area and distinct from others (e.g. consider

---

1 The most recent publication of the Minority Rights Group International iterated the urgent need for global recognition and support of all sign languages as natural linguistic systems (https://minorityrights.org/) -- i.e. it is well accepted at this point that SLP are a linguistic minority.

2 Note, unlike the “minority discourse”, the indigeneity argument cannot been extended to spoken languages used by the colonized and minoritized peoples ‘new’ to the land, though the notion of ‘newness’ in terms of the length of time here is relative. Such is the case of Kven in Norway (due to the Finnish immigration in 18c.), Koryom in Ukraine (고려말; due to Korean forced labor under the Japanese dynasty in 19-20cc.), etc.
Martha’s Vineyard Sign Language in the US, described in Padden 2010). Moreover, not unlike all the other indigenous languages studied thus far (Hinton et al. 2018 for an overview), these languages have been, and continue to be, minoritized in both policy and in the general public view because the people that use those languages are minoritized in both policy and general public view (Krausneker 2003, De Meulder et al. 2019, De Meulder & Snoddon 2020), including access to the right of the native language itself. All of the aforementioned points out to the following: indisputably, to the degree that a language is natural, and autochthonous, and exists independently from any other sociolinguistic layers in a given societal structure, nothing prevents the application of the term “indigenous” as in (1).

Thus, just as indigenous spoken languages, indigenous SLs are languages used by minoritized (and possibly even colonized) peoples who have always been on the land. Here one could talk about Crow SL in the USA and Canada, Swedish SL in Sweden, Israeli SL and Arab-Bedouin SL in Israel, Irish SL in Ireland, as well as the Sámi variety of Norwegian SL in Norway. In terms of the two broad sets of issues involved, here too there is some similarity to be obtained, such as the struggles for legal recognition and representation on the national Census (DeMeulder et al. 2019). And as with indigenous spoken languages, the field diverges between the examination of the issues of language attitudes vis-à-vis the language policies, though the two are of course ultimately related (Aspinall 2005, Busch 2016, Sebba 2017, i.a.). Similar to Kven in Norway as well as Scots and Gaelic in Scotland, some sign language languages have officially been granted the status of minority languages. This is, for instance, as the case of British SL (BSL) in Scotland, currently holding the same status as Scots and Gaelic (https://www.gov.scot/policies/languages/). Whether the move to grant such a status to the language has actually resulted in sovereignty of either of the spoken language linguistic communities is a separate matter altogether. For the relevant sign languages, it has not (see De Meulder 2015 and Lawson et al. 2019, among others, for the discussion). One possibility is that the policy is simply too young. Also, more broadly, as can be seen in the literature (see De Meulder 2015, Jones 2016), due to the language attitudes towards signers, the policy associated with the minority status may yield an ‘empty promise’ more generally associated with the “minority” status. First, simply acknowledging a minority does not necessarily result in any legislative action unless the country commits itself to a status planning program for all minority languages. Just as it is in the case of spoken indigenous languages, the power imbalance of the dominant language in media, education, and other areas of the public sphere is difficult to tilt. The second problem is that the label of a minority does not in principle obligate a country to legislative support, though it arguably should. Instead, what a number of states have agreed to is support of indigenous languages (and their people); to the degree that a language is not recognized as being a member of this category, a country may continue withdrawing its support from funding it.

However, indigenous SLs face an additional difficulty. What makes matters independently complex for SLs in general and indigenous SLs in particular is that even if minority language legislature exists, it protects SLs by focusing on the (non-)hearing characteristics of language users—i.e. not on the cultural contributions of the language to the collective knowledge but on the access it provides to the majority culture. Such a stance makes

---

3 And, thus, just like all indigenous languages studied thus far, these languages and their peoples continue to be in need of legislative support.
4 Turning to the SLs used by the colonized and minoritized peoples ‘new’ to the land, we note American SL in Canada, British SL in Ireland, and so forth (cf. Supalla & Clark 2014).
any revitalization effort Sisyphean because the focus of the legislatively generated attempt at ‘solving the problem’ for the indigenous population is often misplaced. Instead then, we argue, the solution presents itself in the document already offered to various countries—the ‘United Nations Resolution for Rights of the Indigenous People’ (UNDRIP). To clarify: if a country is a signatory of the UNDRIP, it has effectively promised the international community a particular set of actions in support of its indigenous population and its language but has also created for itself a pathway for how to circumvent the years of minoritization of Sign Language Peoples. In this, UNDRIP contextualizes a potential revitalization plan for SLs.

In this paper, we examine an indigenous endangered language that faces the aforementioned revitalization barriers—Icelandic SL (‘íslenskt táknmál,’ ÍTM). On the one hand, unlike many SLs, ÍTM has been legislatively elevated to the status of a first/native language of Icelandic Deaf community (1). However, we argue that this legislative policy is still problematic, since it focuses on something other than the language itself; further, the current policy hampers any potential revitalization efforts. In section 2 we introduce ÍTM and briefly discuss the ‘revitalization barrier.’ In sections 3 and 4 we offer a solution which Iceland has already promised both to its citizens and the international community. Section 5 concludes.

2. The status of Icelandic Sign Language (ÍTM): An endangered indigenous language

The official national primary language of Iceland is Icelandic (de facto and de jure). Over 90% of Icelanders speak Icelandic natively, while about 10% of the present inhabitants of Iceland are native speakers of recent immigrant languages: in descending order of users are Polish, Lithuanian and English (Hilmarsson-Dunn & Kristinsson 2010, Stefánsdóttir et al. 2019), as well as Lithuanian SL, Polish SL, Portuguese SL and Irish SL (Communication Center for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, Ivanova, p.c.). Recently, however, the traditional homogeneity of the population and the relative correspondence between the national language and culture has been changing: up to 80% of children in some Icelandic schools are growing up in multilingual households (see Ragnarsdóttir & Lefevre 2018, Ragnarsdóttir & Tran 2019, i.a.). Overall, the most recent numbers suggest that out of 46,247 children attending compulsory schools, 5343 (15.5%) are exposed to languages other than Icelandic at home, and out of 18,742 preschoolers, 2713 (14.5%) are as well, representing every habitable continent and over 50 languages (Statistics Iceland 2020). Approximately half of these children are likely to have been born in Iceland and can be unequivocally expected to have the knowledge of both Icelandic and their other language(s), given linguistic and educational policies, discussed in the subsequent sections—both, among preschoolers and compulsory school students, 54% are Icelandic citizens. The most well-represented languages outside of Icelandic currently represented in Icelandic schools are shown in Table 1, and the least well-represented languages are in Table 2 (given the low numbers in Table 2, we do not provide % figures; instead, for the reasons that will become apparent shortly, we offer 20 least-represented languages).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Nu</th>
<th>% of Icelandic bi-/multilingual children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preschool</td>
<td>Polish</td>
<td>1,027</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>English</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Philippine</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Languages</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>German</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Arabic</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Vietnamese</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Russian</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compulsory</td>
<td>Polish</td>
<td>1,833</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Philippine</td>
<td>370</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Languages</td>
<td>314</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lithuanian</td>
<td>279</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Thai</td>
<td>238</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Arabic</td>
<td>219</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>214</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Russian</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Vietnamese</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Most well-represented native languages other than Icelandic in Icelandic schools (pre-schools and compulsory), Statistics Iceland 2020
(https://px.hagstofa.is/pxen/pxweb/en/Samfelag/Samfelag__born__1_menntun__1_leikskolaborn/SKO00103.px,

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School level: Primary Language</th>
<th>Nu</th>
<th>Compulsory Language</th>
<th>Nu</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Czech</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Hungarian</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italian</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Nepali</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dutch</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Turkish</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slovak</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Singhalese</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faroese</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Japanese</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bulgarian</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Indonesian</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greek</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Swahili</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finnish</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Finnish</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This change in the linguistic landscape challenges the previously ubiquitously harmonious school assessment results (Thordardóttir 2020) and, therefore, its policies towards other languages and their speakers merit revisiting (Ragnarsdóttir & Lefevre 2018, Ragnarsdóttir 2018, a.o.). But these languages lie outside of the scope of this paper: the aforementioned languages are new to the land, and all deserve attention and support of the legislature and the general Icelandic community (as do Kven in Norway, Koryomal in Ukraine, Irish SL in Australia, but also Polish(SL), Lithuanian(SL), and all others in Iceland). The focus of this paper is a different type of language entirely—one that is autochthonous to Iceland. The reason we bring up the so-called immigrant languages in the first place is this: Iceland appears to have worked tirelessly to track its population, including who is in its schools. In this, we now know what languages are being used by the school children and, therefore, other members of the Icelandic society. Crucially, Table 1 indirectly informs what languages children are (likely) being exposed to. Two things must be noted: first, by labeling “another tongue other than Icelandic” (https://www.statice.is/statistics/society/children/children-education/), the lists of languages from the Statistics of Iceland (2020), partially reproduced in Tables 1-2, focus exclusively on foreign languages, although the children who may be using them at home may have been born in Iceland; second, Polish(SL), Lithuanian(SL), Portuguese(SL), Irish(SL), and other sign languages present in the country are excluded from the official count. But the one point worth iterating here is this: a language clearly missing from the count above is Iceland’s only indigenous language (Hilmarsson-Dunn & Kristinsson 2010 and De Meulder et al. 2019) that is

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Code</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Turkish</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Faroese</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ukrainian</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Macedonian</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Singhalese</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Estonian</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japanese</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Urdu</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swahili</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Greek</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slovene</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Greenlandic</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persian</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Korean</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indonesian</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Hebrew</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urdu</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Slovak</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estonian</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Tamil</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other and undisclosed</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Mongolian</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greenlandic</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Other and undisclosed</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Least well-represented native languages other than Icelandic in Icelandic schools (pre-schools and compulsory), Statistics of Iceland 2020)
not Icelandic--Icelandic Sign Language (ÍTM). This language also happens to be one of the languages that do not rely on voice for articulation.

In the country of 364,134 (Statistics Iceland, Jan 1, 2020), ÍTM is used by fewer than 1700 people (~.005% of total population). Recent estimates suggest that ÍTM is the primary language of about 300 people (~15% of all ÍTM signers), 250 (~15%) of whom are deaf, 52 (.03%) are hearing children of deaf adults at various ages,7 and, according to Thorvaldsdóttir & Stefánsdóttir (2015), 1000-1500 (58-89%) are hearing native-born Icelanders who sign at various levels of proficiency. Additionally, 50 (.03%) Deaf ‘new Icelanders’ are proficient in both ÍTM and a variety of other SLs (Polish SL, Lithuanian SL, ASL, etc.). ÍTM is the only minority language in Iceland that clearly falls under (1); it is indigenous insofar as it is autochthonous, however else one might define indigeneity of SL people(s) and has been minoritized as is typical for such languages (see De Meulder et al. 2019 and references therein). Additionally, while linguistic vitality of the other languages in Iceland is indisputable, matters are different for ÍTM. The conclusion of the Icelandic Sign Language Council (2015 report, see Stefánsdóttir et al. 2015) is that ÍTM is threatened, despite the fact that it has not yet been added to the list of endangered Indigenouns sign languages (UCLAN). Here is why.

Among the signers for whom ÍTM is the first/native SL, and who grew up in Iceland, fewer than five Deaf children have Deaf parents; hereditary deafness has been reported in fewer than three families (Ivanova, p.c., September 2019). This situation has remained the same for over one hundred years. In the immigrant families, this number is higher: three families report hereditary deafness, and nine deaf children have Deaf parents (Sverrisdóttir 2018). Yet, even with the change brought by the immigrant population, almost no Deaf child in Iceland becomes exposed to ÍTM as their first language by the natural caregivers—parents. It also means that the language is not passed along via the route a language typically takes: from parents to children. And with it, also not passed directly are the culture and ways of being. These numbers illustrate the complexity of the ÍTM learner profile but one that is starkly familiar from the indigenous language literature. Indigenous languages tend to be minority languages, typically influenced by the multilingualism of their users (Muysken 2013, McCarty & Wyman 2009, Smith-Christmas et al. 2018, a.o.). In this vein we expect ÍTM signers to infuse new life into the language which will lead to language changes. This is because, as children of already signing parents, they are growing up linguistically and culturally as members of the DEAF^WORLD (Reagan 1985, et

---

6 One option of course is that these foreign sign languages all fall into the Other and undisclosed group. We doubt that this is the reason, however: in 2018, at least nine children were reported to be exposed to multiple sign languages in the home (Sverrisdóttir 2018). However, according to the official count, in 2018 the category totaled eight students across all schools, (https://px.hagstofa.is/pxen/pxweb/en/Samfelag/Samfelag_born_1_menntun_2_grunnskolarborn/SKO02103.px/table/viewLayout1/?rxid=fac8c920-28c6-43dd-a202-66a08138b1d1). Further, according to the reports from the ÍTM-Icelandic bilingual schools, Hlíðaskóli (compulsory) currently hosts 11 students ÍTM-Icelandic bilingual students, and Sólborg (pre-school) hosts eight. Among the Hlíðaskóli students, four are reported to use other sign languages in the home, and among the Sólborg students, two children are growing up in such environments (Hjóðdis Anna Haraldsdóttir, Project Manager at the Sign Language department at Hlíðaskóli, p.c. and Regina Røgnvaldsdóttir, Director of Special Education at Sólborg, p.c.). These numbers clearly indicate that the foreign sign languages are not being counted in the Other and undisclosed group, since the number of multilingual signers with multiple sign languages in schools (totaling six) is different from the number of the officially reported users of Other and undisclosed languages in the Statistics of Iceland 2020. We suspect that the focus of the count of languages in Icelandic schools (the snapshot of which we see in Table 1) is on the spoken language solely--the matter to which we will return.

7 These figures date as of September 2019.
8 To elaborate: after school, almost all signing children in Iceland go home into the environments where they encounter ÍTM as L2—for both deaf and hearing caregivers, ÍTM is an additional language. This means that the quality of input the children receive is variable irrespective of the hearing status of the input-provider simply because the level of ÍTM proficiency is variable. Thus, given the profile of the typical ÍTM learner in Iceland, the language is constantly (and especially recently) under pressure from (a) non-native input from L2 Deaf learners, (b) non-native input from L2 hearing learners, (c) cross-language interaction by sign bilingual children, and (d) generalizing power of children learning their L1 at every cohort. Therefore, when Batterbury et al. (2007) write about the Deaf community as the Sign Language Peoples, for Iceland this definition invites a complication: it suggests that the people must invent their linguistic identity anew with each child. And yet, this is not what happens: the language gets passed along to generations below by people who are both Deaf and not deaf. For instance, as research on ÍTM shows, members of the linguistic community, both deaf and hearing, are able to identify whether a sentence, or word, is acceptable in any given situation, or whether it appears to have ‘migrated’ into ÍTM from the one of the languages the Deaf children are exposed to at home, in addition to ÍTM as has been shown for other sign languages (Plaza-Pust & Morales-Lopez 2008, Lillo-Martin et al. 2016 and references therein). See, for example, Jónsson et al. (2010) and Brynjolfsdottir (2012) for wh-placement in ÍTM (disconnected from their knowledge of Icelandic), Thorvaldsdottir (2011) for features expressed by various types of verb classes; Sverrisdottir & Thorvaldsdottir (2016) on the analysis of vocabulary items i.a. In other words, despite the apparently limited number of users and the complexity of the transmission mechanism, the language as a stable system survives. Further, not only do ÍTM signers have linguistic judgments about it, these judgments are not limited to d/Deaf people. And while this is a language developed by, and associated with, a particular culturally defined group within the DEAF^WORLD, being a member of the ÍTM signing community does not guarantee membership in the Icelandic Deaf Community, and vice versa.

3. Domestic commitment
3.1 Iceland’s legislation on ÍTM

---

8 Generationally signing children experience more natural/proficient, if not native, sign language input as well as stories associated with the culture; this is true of the deaf children of Deaf parents (a.k.a. Deaf-of-Deaf) and hearing children of Deaf adults (Codas) That is, even if the parents themselves are first-generation signers, they will be establishing cultural frameworks with their signing children--to the degree that the language is naturally used in the household, despite potential difficulties, this language continues to be treated as input. In an endangered sign language, as in endangered spoken languages, natural (if not native or proficient) input contributes to revitalization (De Meulder & Snoddon 2020); such is the power of the new signer onto the endangered sign language.

9 One immediate consequence here is that one might expense a difference in the input by the hearing versus deaf parent. First, the hearing parents’ knowledge of the Deaf culture and understanding of the deaf experience is necessarily more limited than that of a deaf parent. Let us set aside the fact that the hearing members of the sign language community are unlikely to become full members of the Deaf culture (typically associated with sign languages, see Reagan 2018, Lu et al. 2016, and many others), and, therefore, many aspects of the cultural framework become inaccessible to the hearing parent. In the case of Iceland in particular, deaf parents report using their Sign L1 with their ÍTM-signing deaf children (Ivanova, p.c.) while hearing parents of the ÍTM-signing deaf children report using ÍTM in the home, which is their L2.
In 2011, after a long campaign for recognition (Stefansdóttir et al. 2019), Icelandic Parliament enacted into law the Act on Icelandic and Icelandic Sign Language (Althing Act no. 61/2011, Article 3, Appendix A.1), in which it takes a strong stand on ÍTM. In this, Iceland differs from many countries which have expressed no such views on their locally used sign languages or have any particular legislation related to them. In fact, Althing Act no. 61/2011 has been used as a model for some other Nordic contexts, like Norway (De Meulder et al. 2019).

Let us first focus on the positive. What makes Iceland different from the US, for example (Koulidobrova et al. 2018), is the overt acknowledgement of the status of ÍTM as a natural language with all its rights and privileges, including (a) the expectation that the language be offered to the deaf children as soon as acquisition begins, and (b) families of these children receive the same instruction, irrespective of the family’s hearing status. That is, Althing recognizes ÍTM as a natural language of both deaf and hearing children who are raised in signing households. Iceland goes further, however. It considers ÍTM one of its official, albeit minority, languages, to be developed and preserved (Althing Act no. 61/2011, Article 13, see Appendix A.2, italics are ours). In other words, Iceland mandates that ÍTM must be supported administratively. However, we might ask why ÍTM is not present among the languages represented in Icelandic schools (see Statistics Iceland 2020). In this, it turns out Iceland mirrors the US. Further, we argue, following previous works, that the positive appearing legislature hides terminology associated with a particular narrative: as Stefansdóttir et al. (2019) demonstrate, ÍTM users in cited in the Act 61/2011 are identified medically, not linguistically; the community is defined not by a cultural framework and language but by a hearing status—explicitly, by the inability to hear and by the lack of access to spoken language, which is assumed to be the norm. This type of narrative is known as audism (Humphries 2004; see section 3.2), which elevates access to sound (a.k.a. hearing) and an overtly articulated assumption that a status other-than-hearing as an obvious need of being amended, or in need of tools for coping with. One such tool, according to the Act 61/2011, is a sign language. Such a stance, many have argued, problematizes sign languages in general and ÍTM in particular.

3.2. Audism as the revitalization barrier for ÍTM

Current discourse in Disability Studies defines ‘disability’ as something differing from inability (Wasserman 2011). The Disability community has rejected this approach wholesale in favor of the human rights framing. Literature has shown that both medical and social models of disability reveal various types of oppression towards Disabled people, akin to racism and sexism. Hirschmann (2012), for instance, writes of disability as a ‘new gender,’ arguing, with much other literature, that disability is best likened to being a member of the LGBTQ+ community. Both

---

10 For comparison, consider the fact that according to the US Census (www.census.gov/), ASL is classified as English (see Koulidobrova et al. 2018 for a discussion). In K-12 schools, hearing individuals with no connection to the deaf culture or sign languages are often able to enroll in ASL courses and count them for modern language requirements; however, hearing families of deaf individuals who are raised with a SL are not typically viewed as bilinguals and, consequently, do not receive the relevant educational funding. This is, at least in part, due to a linguistic policy regarding ASL that deliberately labels it as a non-language (Koulidobrova et al. 2018).

11 One parallel, for instance, is reflected in the fact that gender/LGBTQ framing groups together many different ideologies and responses, as does ableism/disability: e.g. class accommodations for blind students do not work for deaf students. On the other hand, Mauldin (2018) shows that Deaf individuals in her study did not adopt the narratives of ‘coming out’ in describing their experience of ‘becoming Deaf,’ thereby illustrating the tension in comparing the discourses.
researchers outside the Disability community and within it have argued that the disability identification often leads to a cultural identification, though it certainly does not have to (see, for instance, a collection of cases and discussions across various types of Disability constructs in Thomas & Sakellariou 2018 and the overview of 2018-2019 publications by Brueggermann & Brewer Olson).

Here is a problem. In the narrative of Deafness as a Disability, typical discussions about SLs morph into discussions about the use of these languages by the d/Deaf/hard of hearing individuals (DHH)—i.e. the fact that these languages were invented by and for the participation in the DHH community (Reagan 1985, et seq., Batterbury et al. 2007, Murray et al. 2018, etc.). The discourse then shifts from the language to the people of the community and their place in the context of the larger society. This is a clearly important discussion—one which is vital for our collective progress towards equity and justice; however, we think this is clearly a wrong move for the languages themselves. While language and cultural identity are tightly interconnected, they are certainly separable: there are many deaf and hard of hearing people who do not sign at all and consider themselves (and certainly should) members of the Disability Community for the reasons outlined above. To the degree that the SLs continue to be legislatively ‘attached’ to d/Disability-related discourses, whichever the frameworks is assumed, the SLs will continue finding themselves in the same conundrum: the juxtaposition between d/Deaf vs. hearing people—i.e. the community that is still defined by the hearing status and an externally applied pressure to change it.\(^\text{12}\)

An attitude and a set of practices that presuppose normalcy of hearing and, thus, superiority of hearing people over the deaf people is known as \textit{audism}. In this, audism resembles racism—the belief that European white-ness is superior, and that all others must assimilate into its frame of reference. Both audism and racism are related to violence against a person’s personality and human dignity. The concept has been extensively discussed as the defining term in the oppression of the Deaf people (Humphries 2004, Lane 2008, Bahan et al. 2008, a.o.). Crucially, within the audist narrative, which is still perpetuated in every country irrespective of the level of recognition of its SL and the rights of the community that uses it natively, one can easily recognize a particular trend—the fact that both the languages and their users are viewed through a lens other-than-the-lens-through-which-spoken-languages-are-viewed, independent of the age and the geographical location of the language itself. That is, SLs are considered \textit{accommodations due to impairment/disability}—i.e. following the so-called ‘medical model.’ Since this stance problematizes the language itself, its outcome is dire for the language; any

\(^{12}\) Whether the label here is ‘impairment’ or ‘disability,’ one thing these two snapshots have in common is this: their focus on d/Deafness—as a diagnosis in the former and as a cultural identity in the latter. And while it is quite likely that SLs developed to accommodate communication choices of the d/Deaf/hard of hearing communities (and therefore we should reasonably expect tens of thousands of SLs in the history of humanity, just as we do with spoken languages, see Reagan 2018 and references therein), we cannot simply look to the DHH community as the bona fide linguistic community of sign languages. Literature suggests that the most successful communication partners of the DHH individuals are their siblings, even if they are hearing (Carrigan & Coppola 2017, i.a.). Among hearing parents of DHH children, many learn how to sign as well (Weaver et al. 2011). A number of individuals, hearing as well as deaf, learn (other) SLs later in life and become interpreters (Bat-Chava 2000, Humphries 2004, among others). We bring this up as an argument for the following: in the discussion of SLs, the focus ought to be on the language users, not only on the community that had created the language. This is, admittedly, a sensitive and controversial issue: years of oppression of the DHH people by the hearing majority has resulted in a complex relationship between hearing and Deaf signers. We sidestep this point, however, noting that the only path to revitalization lies through the community of signers, whatever the make-up of the membership, as is the case with other indigenous languages.
attempt towards language revitalization must first face the audist discourses which are part and parcel of many hearing societies.

Let us return to the Act 61/2011. As Stefánsdóttir et al. 2019 (a.o.) have pointed out, it underscores the power dynamics between the sign and spoken languages. The dual identification of ÍTM as a language and a “special support” in cases when such is required results in an implementation dissonant with the policy. For instance, someone must decide that the individuals in question ‘have to rely on’ the use of the sign language. Who is credentialed to make that decision, and how is this decision made? For instance, one reasonable criterion for ‘having to rely’ on a particular language in an educational environment is that this language bonds the learner to their parents and their culture (and the parents make such a choice). Such would be an argument from a multilingual standpoint. Another is that the language immerses the learner and her family into the language of their cultural heritage, turning both the entire family into the agents of language revitalization known as the ‘new speakers’ (see, e.g., McCarty & Wyman 2009 and, especially Smith-Christmas et al. 2018 and references therein). This too is typically, though certainly not always, decided by, or at least with an influence of, parents. However, neither of these, we assume, represent the intent of the Althing Act no. 61/2011; and, crucially, it is definitely not what the Act has been used for. Instead, ÍTM is considered to be something that is needed (Article 13 of the Act) due to a diagnosis (Article 3 of the Act) that marks the relevant individuals medically different (disabled or impaired)—i.e. not culturally or by choice.\footnote{ Although of course, medical transformations can be achieved by choice.} In fact, the Act uses the ‘impairment’ terminology explicitly, which leads to an implicature that SL in general and ÍTM in particular is something that, from a medical point of view, the ‘affected’ (read: ‘broken, in need of fixing’) people necessarily must rely on as a solution. This discourse situates the Deaf community (in Iceland and in more generally) ‘at the mercy’ of the medical community in search for such a solution—something that the Deaf community has opposed to vehemently (Stefánsdóttir 2005, 2014b). In essence, such an attitude creates a revitalization barrier in any progressive-identifying country. In the next section, we discuss this attitude in more detail.

What we can surmise from the brief examination of the Act 62/2011 is this: the linguistic policy that perhaps looked good at first glance is (a) fraught with the same problems one finds in other countries (see De Meulder et al. 2019 for other sign languages)\footnote{ See Ragnarsdóttir & Lefevre 2018, et seq. for similar observations regarding the spoken language policy as well.} and (b) requires some amendments before Iceland can truly claim equal and, crucially, equitable treatment of the deaf and hard of hearing individuals. Critically, since the focus, we argue, ought to be pivoted on language (rather than (non-)hearing), the linguistic policy articulated in the Act must be amended before Iceland can truly claim equal and equitable treatment of children who sign ÍTM. Recasting the issue in terms of Shohamy (2006), the problem of such a language policy remains at the explicit level. For additional analysis of the Act along these lines, see Stefánsdóttir et al. (2019).

3.3. Consequences of the revitalization barrier

Given the stance above, it is perhaps not surprising, that just like in other Nordic countries, the application/implementation of the ÍTM-related legislature in Iceland has been viewed as selective, and so is any data collection and reporting related to it. For instance, while other languages present in the country’s schools are carefully tracked and reported as “another mother
tongue,” ÍTM is not. Further, legislatively mandated SL support does not differentiate between hearing and deaf individuals, in practice something else happens: numbers of the signing children are easily obtainable, but given the phrasing of the Act, these children are also necessarily deaf. That is, the number of hearing children who also use ÍTM in the home is not known. In order to discover the number of Codas in Iceland, one must undertake a mathematical procedure: (i) count the number of deaf individuals, (ii) within the set (i), count the number of users of ÍTM; (iii) within the set (ii), count the number of individuals with children. Such a procedure yields the number of Codas—the hearing members of the latter subset. Such potentially problematic math of course works only under the assumption that (a) the parents/caregivers choose to expose the children ÍTM in the first place; and (b) if the numbers are small enough to undertake such a calculation with relative accuracy (vs. the US, e.g., where the number of Codas range between 137,000-188,000, Compton et al. 2014). As a result of this calculation, we arrive at the current number of Codas in Iceland: 52. However, the level of proficiency of these individuals’ ÍTM is unknown: their ÍTM is not assessed on a regular basis. In other words, this population remains overlooked, both legislatively and practically (cf. Kouidobrova et al. 2018 for ASL users in the US).

In compliance with the legislature, Icelandic Parliament funds the Communication Center for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing in Reykjavik (Samskiptamiðstöð heyrnarlausra og heyrnarskertra, SHH). One of the crucial functions of SHH is to consult local stakeholders (schools, families, and the municipal governments) on ÍTM acquisition, interpreting, and the grammar of ÍTM. SHH also creates and administers ÍTM assessments and holds ÍTM lessons for families and playgroups for deaf and hearing children (meant to enrich their signing skills). But while codas have always been welcome to the weekly ÍTM instructional activities (Gaman saman) and family lessons, SHH is under no obligation, from the municipal authorities or any other funding body, to undertake any action for this population; moreover, it is ultimately the school’s recommendation that places the hearing ÍTM-signing children in the ÍTM classes/playgroup at SHH. That is, if such recommendation is not given, it is unlikely that a hearing ÍTM-signing child would attend the sessions (N. Ivanova, Director of Research, p.c.).

Moreover, while both deaf children and hearing children of deaf adults are eligible for (bilingual) instruction in ÍTM at the main school (Hlíðaskóli), according to the recent report Frumkvæðisúttekt (Sigurðardóttir et al. 2019), the school cannot be considered a provider of the requisite environment for signing students: (a) the language is not present in the school in the manner that highlights ÍTM users as a linguistic minority; (b) the school staff is unclear on what qualifies as a bilingual school (yet, they report an intuition that the school is not bilingual); (c) deaf and hearing signers of ÍTM receive different types of language-based instruction which align most directly with their hearing status: for deaf children, this type of instruction results in ÍTM-based content, but hearing signers, receive one hour of ÍTM a week in the form of ‘linguistic support offered only if parents are interested’ (the issue to which we will return). Historically, they have not been (Heiddis Dögg Eiriksdóttir, p.c.).

---

15 We thank the Deaf Association of Iceland for assistance with these numbers.
16 In the US, for example, medical professionals often discourage deaf parents from teaching their children with any access to sound to sign, suggesting instead that they use English with the children (Mauldin 2016). What happens in Iceland with respect to this has not been studied, to our knowledge.
17 Although see Jónsdóttir 2010 for an examination of the linguistic development of codas in both ÍTM and Icelandic.
18 SHH 1990, Act 61 2011
What the implementation pitfalls above have in common is this: hearing vs. deaf signers of the same language are treated differently, and so is the language itself depending on the population. As is most clearly indicated in the Frumkveðisúttekt, even in the bilingual school ÍTM is administratively a ‘special service’ rather than a language—i.e. it is an accommodation provided due to the lack of access to Icelandic, vis-a-vis language proper, to which all children should be exposed universally (as in Humphries et al. 2012). Reframing this point: despite the existence of legislation that is at first glance positive for ÍTM and its people, ÍTM remains minoritized by the general framework that views hearing as the norm and anything as other than hearing—a problem that must be solved. As previously pointed out, the name for this framework is ‘audism,’ which uncannily resembles other types of oppression, such as racism. This is not the first language to be in danger of a decline in user-interest for this exact reason. Languages cited in such contexts attempt to resist the onslaught of the dominating forces that have to do with socio-economical imbalance: i.e. Spanish, Portuguese, French, Mandarin, Russian, and, of course, English—all push at many languages spoken around them.

Research has shown that just like racist attitudes, audist attitudes attend to much that is irrelevant, erase much that is important, and create many traps and pitfalls, while, simultaneously, problematizing and interiorizing, marginalizing, and giving rise to complex social systems of ethnically or racially based domination and inequality (to quote Hill 2008), that development of anti-audist projects, just like the development of anti-racists projects, appears sisyphean. Yet, despite the complexity and the inherent difficulty of such tasks given the existing power structures, it must be done. Similarly, the literature on language revitalization has shown that while a long and arduous road, a path forward exists. This path is directly articulated in the United Nations resolution on the Rights of the Indigenous People (UNDRIP). In what follows, we apply the pertinent articles of the UNDRIP to ÍTM, thus, forging a path towards revitalization.

4. International commitment as a path to a solution: UNDRIP and ÍTM

With respect to the general support of indigenous peoples and their languages, a number of countries have chosen to hold themselves accountable to a particular standard: in 2007, and again in 2018, the United Nations issued a resolution on the Rights of the indigenous people (UNDRIP). While not a bill or a mandate (though see Gunn et al. 2017), UNDRIP is a declaration which provides recognition for indigenous peoples’ rights under international law and sets “…the minimum standards for the survival, dignity and well-being of the indigenous peoples of the world.” (UNDRIP, Art. 43; see Appendix B). The resolution is something that participating countries have signed willingly, some earlier than others. Iceland was among the first wave of signatories (2007). UNDRIP obligates signatory states to ensuring that the rights articulated within the declaration are respected, and the relevant measures are enacted by domestic law (Dylan 2019). For instance, in line with UNDRIP, Norway extends its protections to the Sámi—the indigenous (under (1)) people of Norway.\(^\text{19}\)

UNDRIP contains 46 articles and makes allowances for a variety of indigenous contexts (Appendix B.1); in this, it covers communities that are both hearing and deaf, use spoken and

\(^\text{19}\) It is beyond the scope of this paper to analyze the UNDRIP and its implementation in spoken language contexts, including Sámi; nor are we claiming that any of the countries, including Norway, have successfully implemented the procedures that are consistent with their promises articulated in the UNDRIP. Here, we merely point out the precedence.
Three of the articles reference ‘language’ directly and carry two types of statements: rights of the indigenous community and the responsibility of the state. Arguably, legislative support of a language along this route forges a path towards revitalization.

4.1 Access and representation
Article 13 (Appendix B.2) and Article 16 (Appendix B.3) of the UNDRIP reference access to the mainstream socio-linguistic discourse.

4.1.1. Article 13

While Article 13 addresses a variety of rights, here we focus on one: the interpretation of legal and political proceedings. That is, an interpreter must be provided in court and during any type of administrative proceedings (e.g. a discussion at a human resources office or with a manager of a factory, i.a.). Here we might pause to inquire whether all such proceedings are currently interpreted in Iceland. The answer to that is a ‘no.’

According to the Director of Interpreting Services at the Communication Center for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing in Reykjavik (SHH), federal funding for interpreting services is injected quarterly; services are allocated free of charge on first come-first served base at 3,000 interpreter hours per year, or 17 hours per year per person, free of charge, for communication in the private sphere, such as for employment and for attending various meetings or gatherings. This means that the services are available as long as the funding lasts per quarter. However, what happens outside of this allotment? Hauksson (2018) records stories of ÍTM users not proficient in Icelandic and eligible for interpreting services, resorting to financing their own interpreters in order to participate in the daily activities of the Icelandic society (such as attending parent-teacher conferences, seminars, or partaking in after school activities). Arguably, when DHH individuals are deprived of interpreting services, including the right to participation in the social structures of the country on par with other members of the society, this is a human rights issue. This is true of the DHH people everywhere, including Iceland (Hauksson 2018, i.a.).

Let us consider the issue from a different stance: if, as is in Iceland, interpreting services are reserved only for the DHH people, then the interpreting services have nothing to do with language use but, rather, with the hearing status. Yet, there is nothing in the Article 13 of the UNDRIP (that Iceland has signed) that makes reference to the hearing status of a member of the indigenous community. That is, a deaf Icelander who uses ÍTM as a primary language is eligible for an interpreter twice: because she is deaf (and, thus, is likely to require assistance in accessing spoken language), and because she is a user of an indigenous language that Iceland has promised to support. It is all the more a wonder that not all ÍTM users requiring interpreting services receive them. To the degree that the indigenous people do not receive interpretation services when they need them, this becomes the issue of indigenous people’s rights, dissociated from the (non-)hearing—something that Iceland has voiced a strong support for in signing UNDRIP. Therefore, if Iceland is to continue to claim its place among the countries respecting equality and equity for all, lack of funds should never be cited: either funds must be diverted from other sources, or a different solution altogether must be sought.

Incidentally, UNDRIP builds in an alternative to interpreting in indigenous contexts, and, consequently, to the funding problem—i.e. ‘by other appropriate means.’ Among such potential

---

20 It is beyond the scope of this paper to analyze the UNDRIP.
means, for instance, is (semi-)universal acquisition of the indigenous language: moving the language into a position of enough socio-political and economic power such that everyone is expected to know it, at least for the administrative and legal proceedings. This would mean that a teacher, or a manager, or a public domain employee, would be expected to have a particular level of proficiency in the indigenous language. This, for instance, is a path Brazil took with its policy for Brazilian SL (Libras) in 2008 (Quadros 2012). We bring up this issue to illustrate the following: Brazil is a country with a much larger and more complex geo-political mass to manipulate than Iceland; yet, the aforementioned alternative has already been demonstrated to have produced tangible results (Quadros & Rossi Stumpf 2019). We urge Iceland to explore a similar cadre of options.

4.1.2. Article 16

The content of the Article 16 (Appendix B.3) is access to, and representation in, mass media. In terms of the Article 16 of the UNDRIP, Iceland has committed itself to ensuring that it represents members of the ÍTM community in the State-owned media (and incentivizes private media to do the same). That is, individuals (and especially children) for whom ÍTM is L1 have to see people like themselves represented on TV, in movies, on the political arena, etc. Further, Article 16 dictates that all forms of non-indigenous media must be accessible in ÍTM. This means that in actuality, all forms of media that are in a language other than ÍTM (Icelandic, Danish, English, etc.) ought to be interpreted into ÍTM. Yet, interpretation into ÍTM has been very selective.

Until the COVID-19 pandemic, no interpretation occurred on a daily basis in regular media, though special broadcasts, such as the final pre-elections debate, etc., were interpreted. Any news about DHH individuals or deafness was captioned in written Icelandic (but usually not interpreted). “Children’s news” was interpreted only on the designated ÍTM Day—February 11 (2018, 2019, and 2020). However, since the time of COVID-19 (March 2020), some changes have been implemented: on the national TV channel (RUV), all news programs and three programs on the spread of the virus were being interpreted (which lasted for 8 weeks). Since August 2020, all the information regarding the Covid-19 pandemic and related meetings that have been broadcast 2-3 times a week have continued to be interpreted; the daily news is not, save the daily five-minute general news synopsis that has been broadcast for many years in ÍTM (not interpreted). This, however, is not enough: currently, access for ÍTM signers to content under Article 16 is still provided minimally; some of this access relies on proficiency in written Icelandic, not ÍTM—i.e. the state media operates under the assumption that signers require closed-captioning in Icelandic, not their (sign) language per se. However, access to the dominant language does not equal the actual representation of the indigenous language—i.e. closed-captioning in Icelandic is not the same as interpreting into/representing/creating visibility for ÍTM.

Finally, there are no ÍTM signing characters in the state media save one: for in 2009-2013, the RUV broadcast a bilingual ÍTM-Icelandic children’s show the main character of which was a signing fairy Tinna táknmálsálfur. This show is currently only available online.

---

21 Since the enactment of the policy, Brazil has seen significant successes in both attainment of its policy goals, the collateral economic improvement in the lives of the DHH Brazilians, as well as the status of Libras itself (Quadros & Rossi 2019).
Other programs of this sort ought to be developed so that ÍTM signing children (and adults) can start seeing themselves in such shows. That said, we are encouraged by the current developments in the RÚV: since 2019 RÚV has added material in ÍTM to its website, mostly material for children. In 2020 “ÍTM radio” appeared, as the Communication Centre translated some of RÚV’s radio programs.

We hope the path forward is clear. What we suggest here is not new or radical: various countries have seen similar recommendations for inclusion of indigenous people, and their languages and cultures, into the mainstream media.22

4.2. Education
4.2.1 Article 13

Interpretation and access are the foci of the section #2 of the Article 13 (Appendix B.2). However, this is not the focus of the entirety of the Article. Concretely, section #1 of the Article 13 commits Icelandic government to supporting ÍTM preservation efforts as well as direct ÍTM cultural transmission to the younger generation. The question is what, and how, is to be transmitted.

Regarding the ‘what,’ Article 13 of the UNDRIP makes a direct reference to the oral histories, written systems, place names, etc. Recall the complexity of the passing ÍTM along—unlike any other sign language, it is typically not transmitted from a Deaf person to another Deaf person. Unlike any other language (in general), it is typically not transmitted from a parent to a child. Such a situation makes the cultural transmission pathways that much more vulnerable. Concretely, the ÍTM community must (community internally) designate elders/language carriers and models based on something other than familial belonging. These elders, further, must be supported in language modeling explicitly though documentation efforts and instruction. That is, given the body-politicking interfering in the dissemination of ÍTM, it is all the more reason that the government which has made a promise to support transmission pathways should do so. With funds. This means overtly injecting into various curricula the Sign Language Peoples’ ways of perceiving the world around them, as well as various other cultural characteristics of the DEAF^WORLD (see an overview of programs in Ackerman et al 2018 and references therein).

The promise resulting from the signature under Article 13 also commits Iceland to supporting ÍTM in education, including in developing ÍTM literacy.23 Let us take a moment to see what this would look like. Both in research and in common understanding, literacy is viewed in two ways: one is ‘the ability to read and write’ (e.g. ‘to write something down’, i.e. with reference to writing systems), and the other as the ability to engage with language. The first definition is somewhat outdated and, one might argue, irrelevant: traditionally, SLs are not written.24 On the second approach, literacy is best defined as ‘a way with words’ (Bagga Gupta 2012), which means that an ÍTM-literate individual will show a certain level of proficiency on

---

22 According to the ÍTM Language Council, during the past few months RUV has exhibited increased willingness to cooperate regarding access, including a project for children (currently in progress). On Feb 11, 2019/2020, RUV dedicated much attention to IMT. Still news and other regular programming are not being interpreted on a daily basis.

23 Note, ‘ÍTM literacy’ cannot be equated to ‘Icelandic literacy through ÍTM.’

24 Though a number of glossing systems have been created, e.g. HamNoSys (Hanke 2004)
narratives, story-(re)telling, character manipulation, morpho-syntactic maneuvering of the language to fit various genres, etc. For this to happen, of course, two things are necessary: first, the language must be documented and described; second, assessment norms must be established. In regards to the first, ÍTM corpus construction has been initiated (Muncie 2017), but no official corpus of ÍTM exists. The literature on ÍTM has emerged but the progress is slow. It must be explicitly funded both in graduate, undergraduate, postgraduate, and other levels. The promise of such funding is in the signature of the Icelandic government under the UN resolution to support the rights of the Indigenous people and in the Althing Act 61/2011. In regards to the second, proficiency assessments of signers producing such texts (as well as various other tasks) must be undertaken, much as the text creation efforts across various genres. Data must be publicly available (and not just archived); researchers must be encouraged and incentivized to collaborate across different languages and institutions. Currently, however, the Communication Center for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (SHH) is allocated dedicated funding for a very limited number of positions and billable research hours across all of these activities. Clearly more positions are in order here; the activities the persons in these positions would be undertaking are essentially within the scope of the promises of the UNDRIP Article 13.

4.2.2 Article 14

One other section of the UNDRIP references language, making an explicit statement regarding education appropriate for the indigenous cultural frame and in the indigenous language—Article 14 (Appendix B.4). That is, in tandem with the domestic legislature (Althing Act 61/2011), here is Iceland’s promise to the community of individuals for whom ÍTM as L1: they are eligible for instruction in ÍTM with ÍTM-appropriate cultural references and ÍTM-based assessments, in the same content as other Icelandic children; their hearing status does not matter but their language status does—i.e. any child raised with ÍTM as L1, either deaf or hearing should/could be attending an ÍTM-based instructional programming. In this instructional programming is expected to maintain both of the languages of the child—i.e. the goal of such instructional should be both L1 (ÍTM here) as well as L2 (Icelandic).

In fact, Iceland has an explicit educational policy which reveals precisely this, positioning itself among the other Nordic countries that profess ‘active bilingualism’ stance; see Althing Act 91/2008, Appendix C.1, italics are ours). In fact, in having legislatively adopted active bilingualism, Iceland aligns itself with research-based practices. Consider: in the past several decades, much research has been devoted to models of bilingual education and which of the available models lead to better outcomes for each of the languages (see an overview in Baker & Wright 2017). Whether the linguistic support for each of the languages is achieved via immersion, explicit language teaching, or translanguaging in biliteracy remains a matter of debate and is largely contingent on the appropriateness of the model given a particular socio-linguistic context. With a number of controversial issues at play resulting in dynamic integration (see Garcia & Wei 2015 for a discussion), one thing that all researchers tend to agree on is(25,238),(977,807): any educational framework and ensuing instructional programming claiming support for L1 must be additive bilingual, the main goal of which is acquisition and development of L1 in addition to L2. The flipside of such a choice is the presence of the L1 only insofar as it assists

Note: here we make no claims with respect to whether Iceland has achieved this in other contexts. See Ragnarsdóttir (2019) and references therein.
the learning of the L2, and gradual reduction of access to the L1 in direct relationship to the increase in proficiency in the L2. This type of scenario, known as a ‘transitional model,’ has been argued to be subtractive. By definition, the goals of the two models are different; in particular, support for L1 is not among the goals of the subtractive model. The literature on the difference between the two types of models is robust and we will not do it justice in engaging in an overview here. Instead, we note one thing: only the former and not the latter has been shown to result in fine-grained morphosyntactic knowledge and productive use of both languages. That is, quite simply, if one is interested in ‘active bilingualism’ (rather the use of bilingualism as a means to some other language), ‘subtractive bilingualism’ is a wrong path.

According to the Act 91/2008 then, any child with a language other than Icelandic is eligible for Icelandic as L2 instruction as well as for being viewed as a bilingual, with all the consequences of this framing. That is, a child whose L1 is Japanese; a child whose L1 is ÍTM; or ASL, is too, be this child deaf or hearing. What the aforementioned amounts to is that by the Acts 61/2011 (Appendix A) and 91/2008 (Appendix C) and the UNDRIP (Appendix B), Iceland has committed itself both domestically and internationally, to full support for ÍTM for both deaf and hearing signing children in the educational system on par with Icelandic or other languages, with a promise of additional support to ÍTM given the history of minoritization. The question is whether Iceland delivers on these expectations.

In line with the ‘active bilingualism’ policy, the 2013 version of the National Curriculum Guide for Compulsory Schools explicitly states that “[a] solid knowledge of one’s language is the principal foundation of a durable education’ (Icelandic National Curriculum, p. 97). According to the Guide, ÍTM is no less critical than Icelandic as a key to societal participation, and the home and the school are expected to cooperate in “nurturing and maintaining the interest of pupils, especially in practising reading visual material in Icelandic Sign Language, [...] and in overall language cultivation” (Ibid, p. 109).

The Curriculum Guide offers instruction on organization of a bilingual school, with ÍTM as an integral subject similar to Icelandic as the L1, with education in the language, literature and usage. In addition, all compulsory school subjects in such a school would be expected to be delivered in ÍTM, and in written and spoken Icelandic (if children use it for communication). In summary, the Guide states that sign language students should have an opportunity to use ÍTM in their studies in all subjects. Further, given that this is a bilingual school, students who do not have full command of this language will need to have direct instruction in it, in order to be able to succeed academically and, more generally, participate in the culture associated with the language. In this, the Guide recognizes ÍTM as a language of a daily communication language and instruction, in addition to Icelandic, or at least written Icelandic (see Appendix C.2).

Hliðaskóli: Ytra mat 2016 (an official school evaluation report) notes that Hliðaskóli, the only school in Iceland officially focused on ÍT, is described as ‘fully bilingual’, where Icelandic and sign language of the deaf expected to be equal. However, the reality is different; this reality has also been described in the most recent report Frumkvæðisúttekt (Sigurðardóttir et al. 2019, see section 3.2) and in Stefánsdóttir et al. 2019. Following the argumentation in the latter, we would like to suggest this may be because the Althing Act 21/2011 is articulated only with respect to the deaf and hard of hearing children—i.e. not signing children per se, highlighting, once again, Iceland’s focus on the (non-)hearing of these children, rather than their linguistic contribution. As a result, no obligation is made regarding language teaching; instead, what is
seen throughout the various reports as well as the Curriculum Guide is the obligation regarding the teaching of the deaf. To clarify:

 According to Stefánsdóttir et al. (2019), the school, which at the time of the publication housed 450-480 hearing and 12-17 deaf students, 'provides hearing impaired and deaf pupils with specialized teaching and services where they are included in general classes' (p.241). Despite the “bilingual” label, the school is not fully integrated: ÍTM signing children attend a school-whithin-the-school--the Sign Language Department. As Stefánsdottir et al. (2019) note, the main goal of this department, which ought to be to immerse children into the language and the culture of ÍTM has been to provide access to Icelandic. That is, ÍTM signers do not become immersed into the signing culture and language or receive the necessary language instruction directly.

 Let us first address the issue of linguistic balance. Indicative of this imbalance is the fact that while Deaf history and culture are introduced during ÍTM coursework, all the rest of the school subjects are taught in Icelandic with the aid of an interpreter or a deaf (co-)teacher—i.e. the students 'receive interpreting services to be able to follow general classes' (Ytra mat 2016, ctd. Stefánsdóttir et al. 2019). Further, according to Stefánsdóttir et al. (2019), at the time of the 2016 report, the school numbers at grades 1-5 indicated five deaf students being enrolled in Icelandic (360 minutes) and in ÍTM (80-160 minutes) per week--twice/three times the difference in contact hours. Further, the hearing children in grades 1-7 can optionally enroll in one weekly ÍTM lesson (20-40 min). As Stefánsdóttir et al. (2019) argue, these numbers should be seen in the context of the general curricular requirements for Icelandic children. For instance: 1-7 graders are expected to receive 1800 minutes of weekly instruction in Icelandic or Icelandic as a second language as a subject or ÍTM for the deaf or hard of hearing children (p.96) en toto -- a clear imbalance towards the spoken language, which is the goal, unless one has no natural access to it. Further, in grades 8-10, ÍTM is an optional subject as a language; for comparison, other 'foreign languages' (i.e. English and Danish) are obligatorily assigned 800-900 minutes per week, in total. For an extended discussion, see Stefánsdóttir et al. (2019) and Frumkvæðisúttekt.

 What immediately becomes clear is that the main audience in the ITM classes is the deaf children, and the goal of these classes is access to Icelandic. Those children who are simply interested in taking the language as a course in this bilingual school may do so for 1-3 hours a week. While better than none, this number does not constitute instruction in the language—i.e. delivery of other content material, such as math, social studies, etc. In particular, Coda children do not get instructed in the ways of knowing and the cultural values of their indigenous community (i.e. the Deaf, not deaf community), which ought to be embedded into the curriculum from the indigenous standpoint, or the complexities of the issues facing the community. The ‘ÍTM-based education’ for Coda children in Iceland begins and ends at a few hours of language teaching a week, optionally provided for those whose families are interested in such an approach to education. In terms of their L1-based education, Icelandic Codas perhaps receive more than many other Codas in the world, yet still significantly less than they both deserve and require. It is no wonder then that the research conducted on the languages of the Icelandic Codas (Jónsdóttir and Einarsdóttir 2004 and Jónsdóttir and The Communication Centre for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing 2010) appear to indicate that school-age Codas’ ÍTM skills do not match those

---

27 To the degree that the ÍTM broadly represents the larger Deaf community, the path to articulating the values sustainably are described in DeClerck et al. (2017) but for a different European sign language with a similar status—Flemish SL.
of the deaf members of the ÍTM community. These observations should be seen in light of the general findings that early signing is beneficial for all, including hearing, children (Thompson et al. 2007, Humphries et al. 2012, among others).

In other words, it seems that systematically, what happens in Iceland has not resulted in a true support for both languages at all, as we have previously alluded to in Section 3. In the bilingual school, ÍTM (the language and culture of its community) is essentially mandatory for the children without access to sound, but it is optional and greatly reduced in terms of the number of hours of instruction for students with access to it (signing or non-signing). Nor is it instructed as a subject matter, which is particularly crucial given the lack of generational transmission. The sign language department is essentially reserved for deaf students and exists as a program facilitating access to content. What the aforementioned points to is that the only ÍTM bilingual school in Iceland is truly not bilingual at all, since the students of the schools do not have opportunities afforded by typical balanced bilingual instructional approaches (Stefánsdóttir 2014a-b), and the school that specializes in ITM-based education currently does not offer an environment fundamental for language development (Stefánsdóttir et al. 2015, 2019). The problem is exacerbated by the fact that the vast amount of teaching materials in Iceland are in Icelandic, very few teaching materials exist for ÍTM-Icelandic bilingual learners of ÍTM or on Icelandic, and no credentialed professional development opportunities can be offered to teachers and other in-school professionals in order to be able to successfully teach bilingual pupils in accordance with the national curriculum. This demonstrates a particular view (and, arising from it, treatment) of the language by the political structures of Iceland as a communication system of the people defined biologically, not culturally. These findings also suggest what all needs to be done to change the situation.

Two pictures emerge. First, this quick overview above demonstrates that the linguistic repertoires of hearing and deaf students within the ‘bilingual’ school are not treated on a par by the system which designs the curriculum in the field rather than in policy—i.e. in the implementation of the relevant Acts. Icelandic takes precedence over ÍTM; ÍTM is ‘allowed’ if ‘chosen’ because it is ‘needed for communication.’ That is, students whose education is ÍTM-based are still approached from a very different ideological stance—the language is there to equip them with the so-called tools for general education under the assumption that they necessarily have no access to the material otherwise. In this, the implementation of the educational policy meant to be linguistically equitable, unlike what we find in other countries,

---

28 We interpret these data cautiously since the reports are not widely available, and the fact that at least some of the assessment tools used in the studies are adaptations from a different language (a BSL test, e.g.), the validity of which we were unable to check independently. However, the conclusions of the report are not at all surprising and consistent with much literature on effects of subtractive bilingualism.

29 Let us take a short detour. The only school for the Deaf in Iceland closed in 2002; currently, the DHH children attend the aforementioned ‘bilingual’ school, which is an embedded Deaf enclave within a mainstream hearing school—a solution that has been adopted in many Nordic countries with similar results (De Meulder et al 2019). Because of the size of the deaf population, it is not viable to have deaf-student only classes (due to lack of peer interaction). What is a solution? We suggest that approaching ÍTM signers as language users. That is, what is needed is a true bilingual program, where signing children are not differentiated by hearing status but, instead, by language status. Only such a program can offer a path towards linguistic development because it can offer the small population of the deaf ÍTM signers communication peers. Further, the focus of such a program will be on the language, rather than the physical characteristics, of the learners.

30 This phrasing highlights the fact that the ITM-using DHH students in the school are not approached as a group using a legitimate language. In reality all language users use language because of the ‘need for communication’; isolating sign language in this manner suggests that it is viewed as an alternative system.
eventually results in exactly what we find in other countries. Even if the design were different
(bilingualism, with the overt acknowledgement of the native language), the expected outcome
remains problematic—if bilingualism begins to develop, this bilingualism is *subtractive*, with the
sole intent being access to content in Icelandic. That is, whatever the good intentions, the
‘bilingualism’ practices are misaligned with the legislative promises, both domestic, and
international ones. In other words, what Iceland has to do is unambiguously articulate and
implement an additive bilingual policy towards its signers. Many models are available in the
literature how one might want to proceed (see Baker & Wright 2017 for an overview). Until it
does, no changes can be expected: as Skuttnab-Kangas has argued in various works (e.g. (2010))
and in, most recently, Skuttnab-Kangas et al. (2020), transitional bilingual programs for
indigenous children tend to amount to cases of linguicism at best and linguistic genocide at
worst.

Second, the country that requires particular agencies to pay for assessment tools and
administration for majority languages should do the same for minority languages as well. To
clarify: if the development of curricular tools in the dominant language (e.g. Icelandic as L1, or
Icelandic as L2, or English as L2 for Icelandic schools) is necessarily funded by government
agencies, so should be non-optionally minority language curricular development. The country
that requires certain levels of training from teachers of written Icelandic and other languages
(e.g. English) for children who use the majority language should do the same for teachers of
written Icelandic and other languages (e.g. English) for children who use minority languages.
And if dominant language literacy rises to the top of the agenda of the dominant language
taskforce, so should the non-dominant language literacy. This is especially true if that language
has been historically minoritized in a country that proudly considers itself a proponent of equity,
as is the case of a sign language in Iceland. Crucially, as the literature on minority languages has
shown, curricular expectations of indigenous people, on par with those of non-indigenous
people, ought to be reflected in the educational system.

What then comes out from Article 14 of the UNDRIP (Appendix B.4) is a different type
of commitment of educational policies and concomitant funding—a non-optional approach to
ÍTM-based schooling and curricular/assessment development and delivery. This also means an
investment in pre- and in-service teacher training, for three languages (ÍTM, Icelandic and other
languages, e.g. English) as well as instructional content. All of the aforementioned would
demonstrate the country’s commitment to its people (Althing Acts) and to the international
community (UNDRIP). Given the fact that ÍTM is under threat, one clear outcome of the
articulated commitments is this: whatever Iceland does to further Icelandic, the efforts must be
doubled for ÍTM.

5. Outlook

Given that the language under examination is highly endangered, we ask for the path of
‘survivance’ for ÍTM (see Vizenor 2008 on both ‘resistance’+‘survival’). We hope to have
shown in the previous sections that revitalization of ÍTM has an additional barrier—one that
drives the focus away from the language itself and, instead, perpetuates the narrative of
(non-)hearing/(lack of) access to sound, and so forth. That is, it defines the ÍTM community in

---

31 This is of course true for the spoken language bilingualism as well, but we set this issue aside here focusing on
ÍTM-Icelandic bilinguals.
physical/disability/medical terms, and in this, despite the progressive legislatures, Iceland’s practices remain audist in nature: the country either inadvertently propagates the medical model of Sign Language and, therefore, undermines its own commitment articulated in the UNDRIP, or simply falls short on implementing the promises it has made as a domestically and internationally. The current domestic policy and the lack of action promised international cuts across language attitudes associated with the medical model of sign languages, which carries detrimental effects for the users of ÍTM and the language itself. Crucially, to the degree that ÍTM is considered (simply) a tool for learning Icelandic, the problems persist. Considering the nature of prejudice, as a result, Sign Language People are not afforded the opportunity to fully develop their abilities and prejudice against them is constantly being recreated. Other Nordic contexts, where local sign languages are considered indigenous and/or minority languages (like Norway, Finland and Sweden), exhibit similar patterns of minoritization and its consequences (Haualand & Holmström 2019, De Meulder 2015 & 2017). It turns out, however, that in many ways, the injustice associated with being a non-dominant indigenous community where the language, as well as the community that uses it, is a minority precisely because it is minoritized. When a country takes a stand on its policy regarding the community and its rights, including ensuring the preservation of the community’s language, certain implications fall out. Some of these are community-internal; others—top-down, community-external.

For instance, recently Iceland has overtly distanced itself from the medical model of sign languages and the audist discourses related to it: on July 27, 2019, the World Federation of the Deaf ratified a new Charter addressing Sign Language rights for all individuals, which overtly “emphasizes the paradigm shift from the medical model” and upholds the status of the national sign language such at it becomes on par with the national spoken language (http://wfdeaf.org/news/resources/wfd-charter-on-sign-language-rights-for-all/). In the days that followed, Iceland, in the person of its President, was the first nation to sign the Charter (https://www.stjornarradid.is/efst-a-baugi/frettir/stok-frett/2020/02/11/Island-undirritar-fyrst-rikk a-althjodlegan-sattmala-um-rett-allra-taknmals-/). Here, the country has taken a strong stance with respect to its plans for its indigenous SL—ÍTM. The fact that Iceland has recently signed the WFD Charter while also being a signatory of the UNDRIP, makes us hopeful that the country plans to begin passing new legislations as well as implementing its promises on the legislations it has already passed. What will ensue is revitalization of ÍTM.

Sverrisdóttir (2018) points out that the ÍTM community itself has been vocal about its needs. Since 2015 there have been attempts, both by the Deaf Association and by individuals, to attract the attention of the members of the ÍTM community to the issues of preservation and revitalization. Hauksson (2018) states that ÍTM is facing extinction if no changes occur to prevent that from happening. Hauksson, who is himself a child of Deaf parents and grew up in the Deaf community, analyzes discourse arising from two governmental institutions and comes to the conclusion that there is a wide-spread societal ignorance about the role and function of ÍTM in the lives of deaf people; that is, despite the commitment at the top (see (5)-(6)), in the mainstream Icelandic society, medical model prevails. Consider, however, what would happen if what Iceland had promised to do actually happened. For instance, if, per Article 16 of UNDRIP, a typical hearing Icelander saw both ITM being used on national television and people for whom ÍTM is L1 represented daily, this typical Icelander, having become a government official, would be expected to be more understanding about and conversant within the community of ÍTM users
This increased visibility would further provoke more interest in both ÍTM and its culture in both children and teachers (pre- and in-service), leading to the creation of curricular and assessment materials, per Article 14 of the UNDRIP. And if the materials and assessments are funded, administered, and are accountable to, by the same agencies as for Icelandic and other languages (e.g. English), the impetus for the paramount quality of delivery would be present without question. Finally, if the government offers grants for language documentation (and preservation) efforts, this means that more individuals may become involved in learning both the language and about the language, which has been shown to extend the ‘health’ of the language itself. Among such efforts (Article 13 of UNDRIP) are ‘the language nest’-type schools or ‘language showers’, known from other successful indigenous language revitalization programs (Hinton et al. 2018) as well as funds for theoretical and applied graduate studies on and in ÍTM itself. One thing this set of efforts clearly excludes is offering parents a choice to deprive a child of language during the first year of their life or giving municipalities an option to not fund certain assessment or other educational activities. Instead, Icelandic government’s position articulated in the various Althing Acts is to ensure that quality ÍTM-based education, comparable to that of the Icelandic-based education is to be given to a DHH child and his/her family as soon as the process of language acquisition can begin, both for the children and their family members (i.e. entry at various age points). This means that the government plans to fund a quality ÍTM-based education agenda. Further, as indigenous children and adults should see themselves represented in the media, so should they see themselves represented in the educational and statistics for the country (see Table 1). These are just a few examples of the directions for the language revitalization that are plottable from the commitments Iceland made in the early 2000s. Wesuspect that the series of steps we propose for Iceland will lead to more general interest in the language by the non-members of the ÍTM community as well. Other countries have demonstrated that increased visibility of sign languages and Deaf experiences, despite the continued audist practices, result in concomitant increase in societal interest in learning these languages and their cultures (Looney & Lusin 2020). In this, as research on indigenous languages shows, schools (can) serve as hotbeds of language revitalization (Vangsnes 2020).

Thus, we remain hopeful: as long as Iceland’s signers continue to exist as the community, so will signing (Bickford et al. 2015). The question is whether it will give in to Icelandic (on the hands) or be revitalized and will thrive as ÍTM. The latter can and will only happen through the efforts of the individuals, the community of users, and the outside political support. For the language not only to survive but also to prosper, embodied experiences of the community must be recognized, which means that both the language users, language activists, linguists working on documenting of ÍTM as well as other agencies involved in the work must demonstrate the renewed commitment to include history and collaboration at every legislative cycle. Given the history of the movement for the rights of its signing community, and its general commitment to equality and equity both in the workplace and education for all its citizens, we expect that Iceland’s governing bodies and other relevant agencies regularly assess and review the policies outlined here while collaborating with the representatives of the ÍTM community to ensure that the goals articulated by the country in its various legislative acts are met. Describing the policy towards education of the signing community in the US, Lawyer (2014) calls for the “removal of the colonizer’s coat” (Lawyer 2014). She argues that ultimately, the US approach to the

---

32 The newest Principal of the Hliðaskoli—the ÍTM-Icelandic ‘bilingual’ school that stepped into the position in August 2020 is Deaf and is the ÍTM signer themselves. We commend Iceland on this move.
education of the DHH children is oppressive in a very particular way: any improvement of educational and social outcomes of the Deaf community resulting from audist practices can only be achieved through explicit decolonization procedures and practices—the narrative that is familiar from indigeneous language literature. We agree with Lawyer wholeheartedly. As perhaps has become clear, we suggest an amendment to Lawyer’s thesis: the aforementioned is true for the educational outcomes of the indigenous signing community (as well as the DHH community, given the partial overlap in membership). And as soon as we pivot the focus on the linguistic community, we can remind the country in question of its responsibilities and overtly articulated commitment to decolonization and dismantling oppression which, in turn, are socially created so that the privilege is constantly maintained and strengthened.

We looked to the country that has claimed that its signing citizens have the same linguistic rights as its speaking citizens—Iceland. Therefore, if the equal status of languages in practice has not (yet) been obtained, it should certainly be done. Crucially, this is not because the ÍTM community members are Disabled or somehow medically lesser/different. It is also not because the community is small and the language might be on the verge of extinction if Iceland does nothing (see Davis 2017 and many others against this line of argumentation). It is because Iceland has made some promises to both its own and the international community; thus, we hold its executive and legislative bodies (Althing as well as the local offices it directly influences) to these promises for the future. This is all the more urgent now, given that the bilingual compulsory school has seen a reduction in enrollment of ÍTM-signing students: this year, only 11 signing students are enrolled in Hlíðaskóli—the compulsory school (compare these numbers with Stefansdottir et al. 2019, i.a.). We are, however, excited to see how Iceland plans to enact its equitable policies and change the currently inequitable ones toward ÍTM, and whether the eight ÍTM-signing children currently enrolled in Sólborg (the bilingual pre-school) will grow up in a different Iceland—the Iceland that ‘puts its money where its mouth is’ or, rather, where its hands are, as the case might be.

Works Cited


Note, Lawyer (2014) focuses on the US, which has not yet recognized its signing community as a linguistic community per se and, therefore, a bona fide minority; thus, a longer road is ahead.


M. De Meulder, Joseph Murray, and Rachel McKee (eds.). The Legal Recognition of Sign Languages: Advocacy and Outcomes Around the World (Multilingual Matters, 2019).


G. K. Lawyer, Removing the Colonizer’s Coat in Deaf Education: Exploring the Curriculum of Colonization and the Field of Deaf Education. Doctoral dissertation (University of Tennessee, 2014). <trace.tennessee.edu/utk_graddiss/5036>


L. Mauldin, Made to Hear: Cochlear Implants and Raising Deaf Children (University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2016).


R. M. Quadros de and Marianne Rossi Stumpf, ‘Recognizing Brazilian Sign Language: Legislation and outcomes, in M. De Meulder, Joseph Murray, and Rachel McKee (eds.). The


V. Stefánsdóttir, Ari P. Kristinsson, Heiðdis D. Eiríksdóttir, Hjörðis A. Haraldsdóttir and Rannveig Sverrisdóttir. Skýrsla málnefndar um íslenskt táknmál um stöðu þess 7. júní 2015 [Report from the Icelandic Sign Language Council on its Status June 7th 2015], <https://is.signwiki.org/index.php/Sk%C3%BDrsla_M%C3%A1lnefndar_u%m%C3%ADslenskt_t%C3%A1knm%C3%A1l&utm%3B6%3CB6%3BC0u%3C%3BESS_7.%3C%3BA%3C%3AD_2015> , visited on 20 September 2020.


Ø. A. Vangsnes, ‘A Prognosis for Sámi in Norway: Schools As Key To Revitalization.’ Manuscript (University of Trømso, 2019).


Appendix (Supplemental Materials)
A. Althing Act no. 61/2011:

1. Article 3. Icelandic sign language.

Icelandic sign language is the first language of those who have to rely on it for expression and communication, and of their children. The government authorities shall nurture and support it. All those who need to use sign language shall have the opportunity to learn and use Icelandic sign language as soon as their language acquisition process begins, or from the time when deafness, hearing impairment or deaf-blindness is diagnosed. Their immediate family members shall have the same right. (Althing Act no. 61/2011, Article 3)

2. Article 13. Duties of central and local authorities and the status of Icelandic sign language

I. Central and local authorities shall ensure that all those who need Icelandic sign-language services have access to them. Central and local authorities shall be responsible for preserving, developing and facilitating the use of Icelandic sign language. Emphasis shall be given to enabling Icelandic sign language to develop academic terminology in different fields and put it to use.

II. Icelandic sign language has the same status as Icelandic as a medium of expression for interpersonal communication, and discrimination between persons on the basis of which of the two languages they use is prohibited. (Althing Act no. 61/2011, Article 13)

B. United Nations Declaration on the Rights of the Indigenous People

1. Recognizing that the situation of indigenous peoples varies from region to region and from country to country and that the significance of national and regional particularities and various historical and cultural backgrounds should be taken into consideration. (https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/DRIPS_en.pdf, p.4)

1. Article 13

1. Indigenous peoples have the right to revitalize, use, develop and transmit to future generations their histories, languages, oral traditions, philosophies, writing systems and literatures, and to designate and retain their own names for communities, places and persons.

2. States shall take effective measures to ensure that this right is protected and also to ensure that indigenous peoples can understand and be understood in political, legal and administrative proceedings, where necessary through the provision of interpretation or by other appropriate means.

1. Article 16
1. Indigenous peoples have the right to establish their own media in their own languages and to have access to all forms of non-indigenous media without discrimination.

2. States shall take effective measures to ensure that State-owned media duly reflect indigenous cultural diversity. States, without prejudice to ensuring full freedom of expression, should encourage privately owned media to adequately reflect indigenous cultural diversity.

1. Article 14

1. Indigenous peoples have the right to establish and control their educational systems and institutions providing education in their own languages, in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning.

2. Indigenous individuals, particularly children, have the right to all levels and forms of education of the State without discrimination.

3. States shall, in conjunction with indigenous peoples, take effective measures, in order for indigenous individuals, particularly children, including those living outside their communities, to have access, when possible, to an education in their own culture and provided in their own language.

C. Althing Act 91/2008 (Act on Compulsory Schools)

1. "Students with a different mother tongue than Icelandic are entitled to instruction in Icelandic as a second language. The teaching is aimed at the active bilingualism of these learners and that they can attend primary schools and participate actively in the Icelandic community. Primary schools may recognize proficiency in the mother tongue of students with a different mother tongue but Icelandic as part of compulsory education is replaced by compulsory schooling in a foreign language”    (https://www.althingi.is/lagas/nuna/2008091.html)

2. Alnámskrá grunnskóla, Almennur hluti 2011, Greinasvið 2013

   a. “Reading" of sign language literature is important - literature that reflects life and history of "sign language speaking people."

   b. Good knowledge of deaf culture is important for "self-understanding" and to gain respect for ÍTM.  (Alnámskrá grunnskóla, Almennur hluti 2011, Greinasvið 2013)