

Sign language rights for all, and forever?

Maartje De Meulder

University of Namur



@mdemeulder

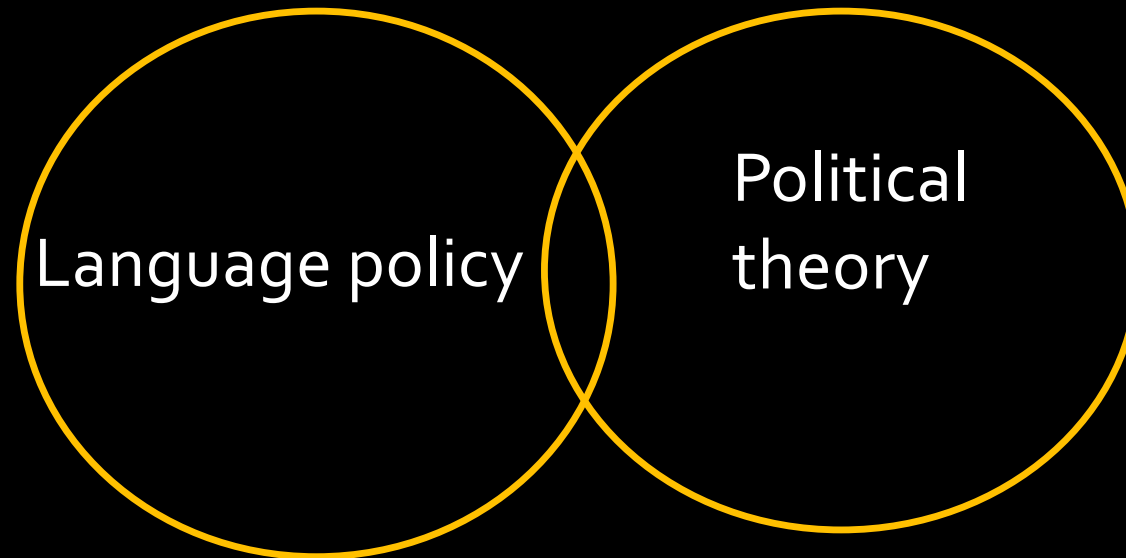
#wfd2019

Sign language rights

Why?

When?

Sign language rights



Kymlicka & Patten 2003; May 2014; Wee 2011

#wfd2019

WHY

Sign
language
rights

Why?

Are our
arguments for
sign language
rights still
valid?



1. Deaf people need sign language

2. Sign language is the only language deaf people can express themselves fully in

3. Sign language is the only language that is 100% fully accessible

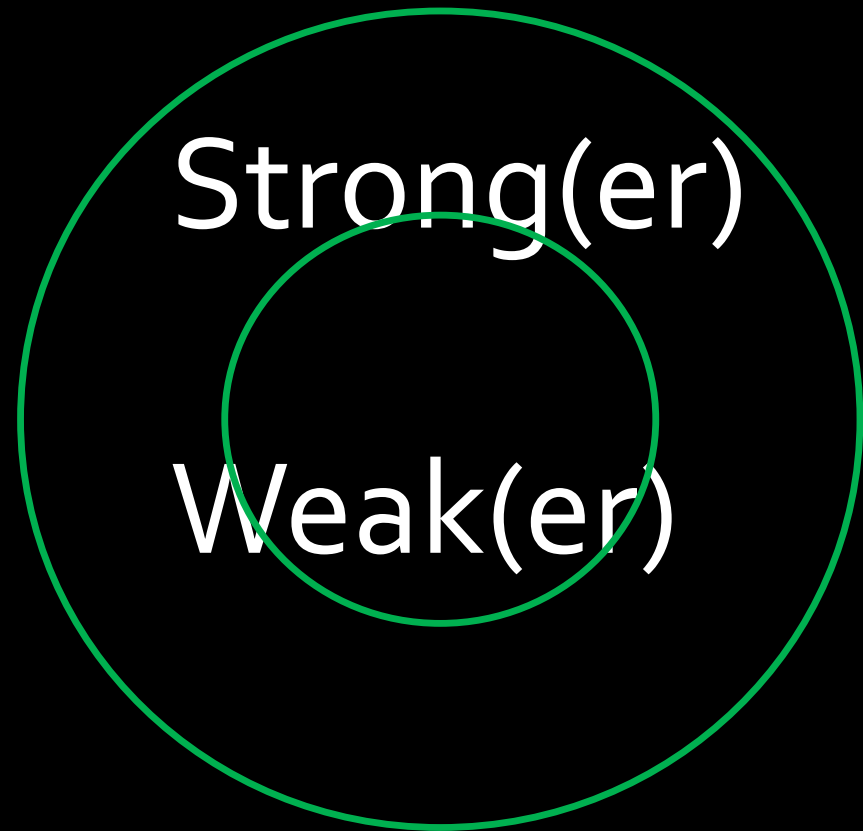
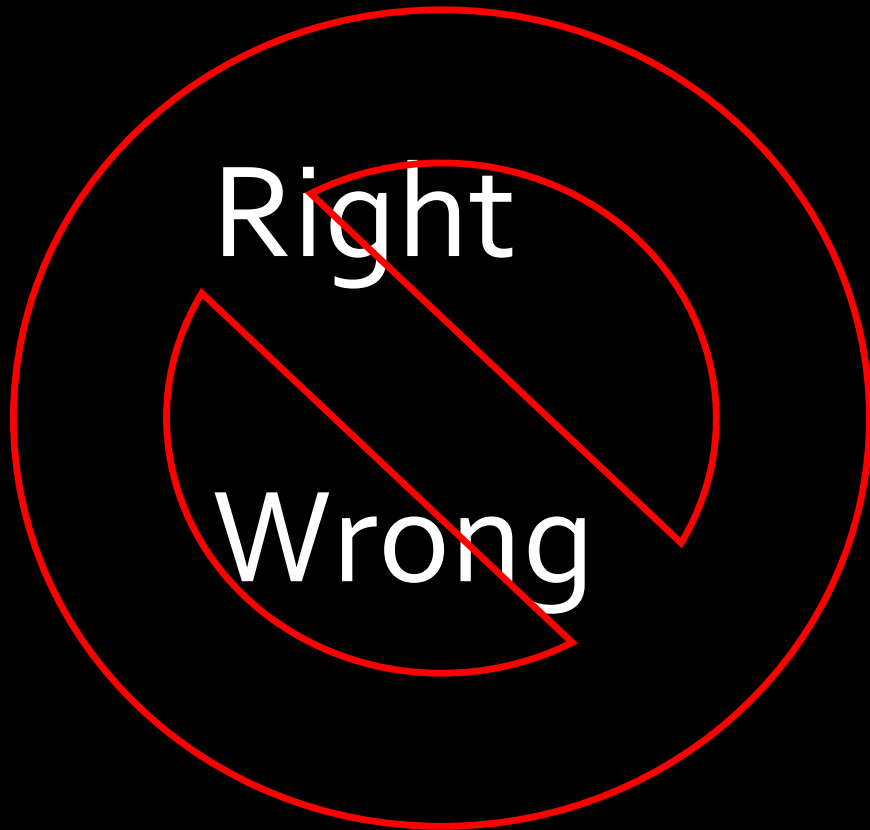
4. Sign language is unique and beautiful

5. Sign language is deaf people's first language

6. Sign language is beneficial for ...

7. Sign language gives access to ...







1. “Deaf people need sign language”



Deficit argument:
“rely on”, “can’t speak”



Who decides about “need”?



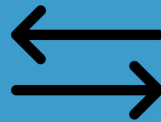
What if deaf children say they don’t “need” sign language (anymore)?



2. "Sign language is the only language deaf people can express themselves fully in"



Who can ever express themselves fully in any language?



Dependency argument



Overlooks broader linguistic repertoire



3. "Sign language is the only language that is 100% accessible"



What does "accessible" actually mean?



Accessible for whom? Nice if you can access it but what if you cannot use it with anyone, if it has no instrumental value?



Importance of exposure, peer group, immersion settings etc.



What if other languages/modalities become '100%' accessible?



4. "Sign languages are unique and beautiful"

That's right!

(... But so are all languages... And yet many cease to exist because speakers stop using them.)





5. “Sign language is deaf people’s first language”

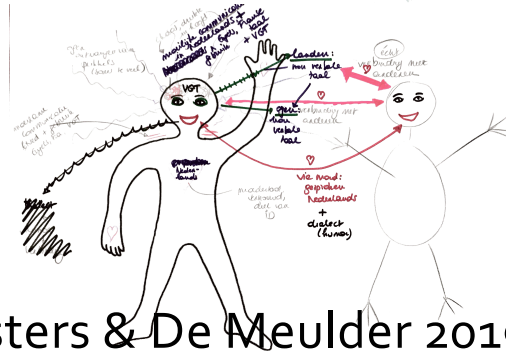
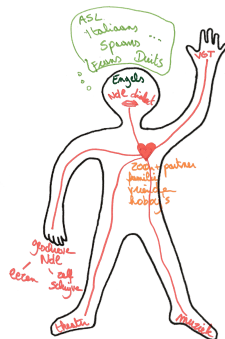
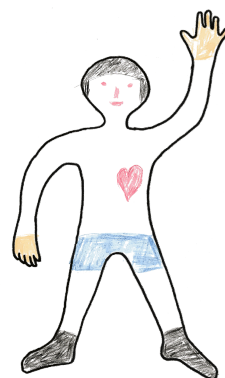
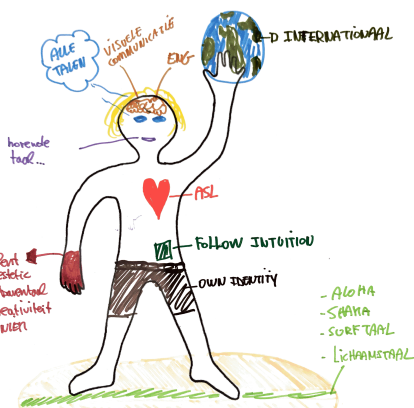
- Not in all contexts and all situations
- Deaf people engage in ‘linguaging’
- Make contextual language and modality choices influenced by different factors
- We don’t know a lot yet about what governs language/modality choice

| Dagboek | Datum: | 2/10/17 | | | |
|----------------|------------------------------|----------------------|-------------------------|------------------------------------|--|
| Uur | Taal | Plaats | Onderwerp (wat deed je) | Met wie (dof/horend + leeftijd) | Opmerkingen |
| 7:45 8:45 | Nederlnd | thuin | hand lezen | | |
| 8:50 9:50 | VGT | thuin | ballen, palen | groot 27j horend | |
| 9:50 12:00 | VGT | VGT | ballen, vlaggen | | |
| 9:50 12:00 | Nederlnd | VGT | minic (5 minic) | | when finished (if any left) with wonder is ok |
| 12:15 13:15 | VGT | VGT | horende met vlaggen | A man 26 A man 21 A woman 28 | |
| 13:15 16:15 | Nederlnd | VGT | handbal | A woman 25 | heel fijn! |
| 16:15 17:00 | Eng + IS + VGT + Nederlnd | minic/ swid minic | andring van thuis | | |

| dag 5 | | dag 6 | | dag 7 | |
|-------------------------|-----------|---|--|-------------------------------------|--|
| Dagboek Datum: 02/10/17 | | | | | |
| Uur | Taal | Plaats | Onderwerp (wat deed je) | Met wie (doo/horend + leeftijd) | Opmerkingen |
| 08:30 - 09:50 | NED | ket | gesprek met zus en halfzus | Tamara (19) halfzus (22) | |
| 9: - 11:00 | NED + ENG | bu, aula | uitles prof (inhoud) in het hist. oud? | prof (~ 70) | |
| 11:00 - 12:00 | NED | Leven stud | gesprek met vriend (ouders) over zijn studie verloop | | |
| 14:00 - 14:30 | NED | ket | gesprek met zus + schalen met vriendin | Tamara (19) vriendin (24) | |
| 14:30 - 16:30 | NED | PSI (psychologisch instituut KU Leuven) | PAL-coaching | Klaagmakers (19) BL-waaches (11) | |
| 16:00 - 18:00 | NED + ENG | ket | gesprek met zus + engelse kleris (Luthe) | Tamara (19) | |
| 18:30 - 19:30 | NED | Leven stud | gesprek met vader + studenten om "meten en pelen" | medisch studentefunctie + pelen/fit | |
| 20:30 - 22:00 | NED | fabriek industriële psychologische bing | " | " | vrijdag na een paar dagen weekend maar wel |

| Dagboek | Datum: VR. 15/9. | | | | |
|-------------|------------------|--|-------------------------|---|--|
| Uur | Taal | Plaats | Onderwerp (wat deed je) | Met wie (doof/horend + leeftijd) | Opmerkingen |
| 16u45 | gestuurd | helder, bij licht | glas repden. | conjurie & zijn vrouw | goedendag geknikt, hij vroeg of ik terug nr boven moest met licht (leken dat hij won wachten) dan. ik zei dat ik met hoofd en ik weg ging. |
| 17u00-18u30 | NL | station & trein | whatsapp | viendinnengroep (3 vrouwen, mijn leeftijd) horend. | ↳ mee afgesproken vanavond. |
| " | " | " | " | Maartje | ↳ CI gaat in mijn auto. |
| 18u30-21u20 | NL gesproken | in de auto onderweg nr vriendin & bij vriendin thuis | baby bezoek | 7 v.d. 8 viendinnen van de viendinnengroep mijn leven. + partner v. een van hen. mijn leeftijd | (CI) |
| 21u20-21u45 | NL gesproken | trein | onderweg nr Gent | ↳ groepsgesprek: moeilijk te volgen een v.d. viendinnen. een-op-een gaat beter dan in groep. slapt af in taal. | (CI) |

De Meulder & Birnie, submitted



Benefits of Auslan



Improves child-parent bonding

01



Improves attention, memory, reasoning and more

02

Accelerates speech and emotional development

03



Enables children to communicate effectively

04



Lowers frustration levels

05



6. Sign language is beneficial for ...



- Speech development
- CI outcomes
- Parent-child bonding
- ...




Instrumental arguments




7. Sign language gives 'access' to ...

- Instrumental argument
- Of all arguments this one is most 'disability framed'
- "Access" often only because there are interpreters (De Meulder & Haualand 2019)





**Ai-Media**
@accessinclusion

Today is National ASL Day in the United States. This day is reserved to celebrate American Sign Language and the **#access** it provides to millions! [#SignLanguage](#) buff.ly/2Uj9u9J

♡ 28 8:00 AM - Apr 16, 2019

[See Ai-Media's other Tweets](#)

Screenshot captured by [screenshot.guru](#) on Thu, 06 Jun 2019 09:39:48 GMT.

Permalink: twitter.com/accessinclusion/status/1118061581450006529

EUD
@EUD_Brussels

Accessibility through sign language is essential for deaf community [#PoliticalParticiaption](#)

EU Disability Forum @MyEDF
.@StevensHelga "Everyone should have the right to information", pinting that access to ielectoral information is not fully accessible [#DisabilityIntergroup](#) [#PoliticalParticipation](#)

♡ 13 7:49 AM - Jul 5, 2018

[See EUD's other Tweets](#)

Screenshot captured by [screenshot.guru](#) on Thu, 06 Jun 2019 09:38:10 GMT.

Permalink: twitter.com/EUD_Brussels/status/1014778316212105216

#wfd2019

1. Deaf people need sign language

2. Sign language is the only language deaf people can express themselves fully in

3. Sign language is the only language that is 100% fully accessible

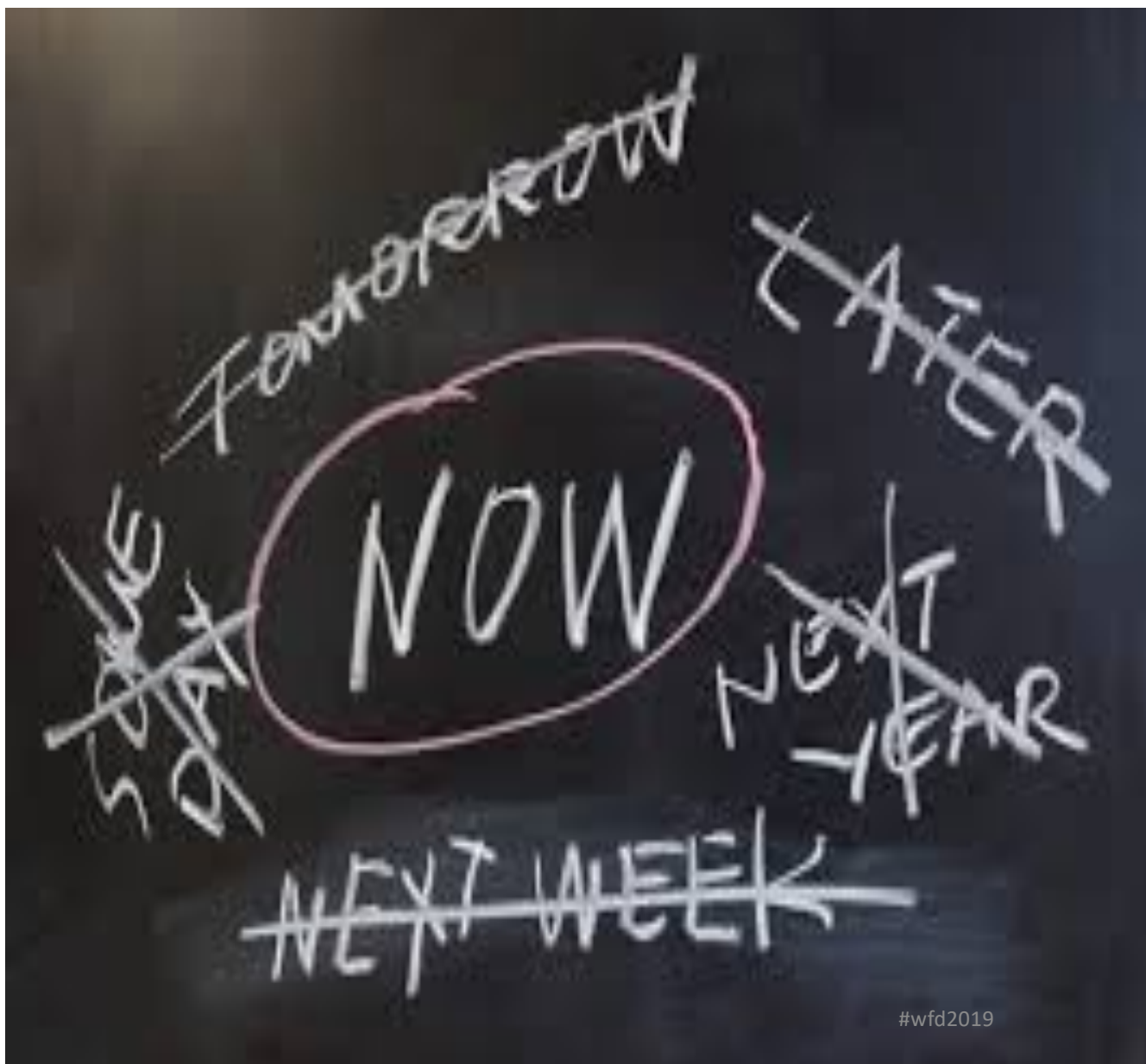
4. Sign language is unique and beautiful

5. Sign language is deaf people's first language

6. Sign language is beneficial for ...

7. Sign language gives access to ...





**Sign
language
rights**

When?

Sign language rights: when?

- Language/linguistic deprivation (e.g. Humphries et al. 2019; Hall et al. 2019)
- 'Critical period hypothesis'
- Not every lack of early access to sign language is 'language deprivation'
- **One window => multiple windows**
- 'Late signer' => new signer? (while being mindful of modality privileges!)



Sign language rights

Why?

A lot of focus on

access

need

first

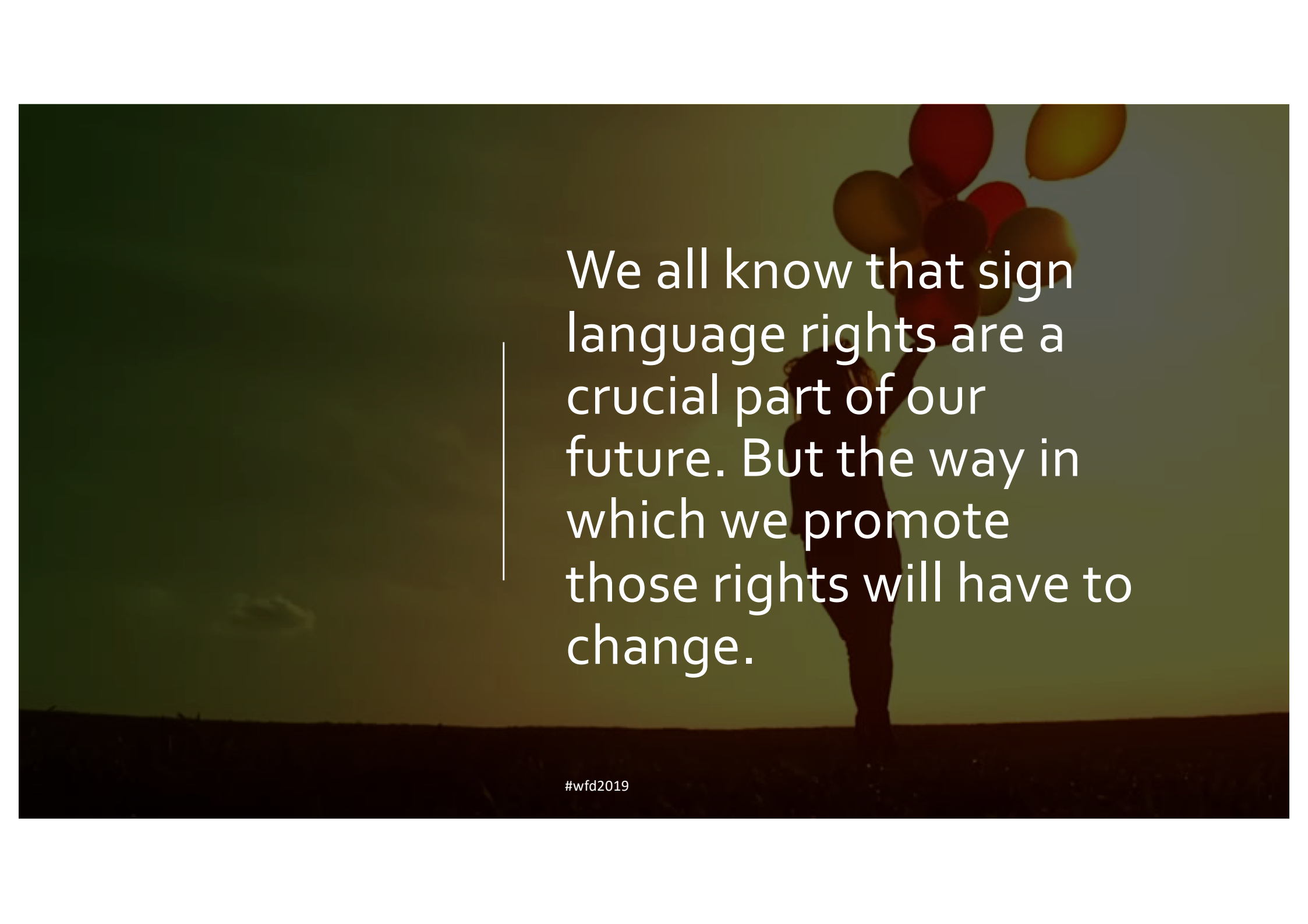
only

When?

A lot of focus on

early

babies and small children

A person is silhouetted against a warm, golden sunset sky. They are holding a large cluster of colorful balloons in shades of red, orange, and yellow. The person stands on a dark, flat horizon line. The overall mood is hopeful and uplifting.

We all know that sign language rights are a crucial part of our future. But the way in which we promote those rights will have to change.



Unique and mainstream

How we feel about/experience
sign languages => unique

How we promote sign
languages/sign language rights
=> must become mainstream

1. Sign languages are among the languages deaf people use (not the only languages)

2. Deaf people must have the opportunity/motivation/incentive to sign

3. Opportunity to sign across the lifespan (early is better, later is good)

4. Deaf people have the right to choose to sign (irrespective of...)

5. Sign language rights are no longer only physical but increasingly digital

6. Sign languages must be given breathing spaces

7. Sign languages are a part of human and linguistic diversity




Sign language rights for all and **forever**?

- Sign language rights: not an accommodation because lacking proficiency in majority language(s)
- But a right irrespective of this proficiency
- Even if deaf people can 'access' and use other languages, the right to sign must be safeguarded



Sign language rights for **all** and forever?

- Right to sign across the lifespan
- As early as possible. Later is good, early is better
- Learn from the language trajectories and practices of **deaf new signers and welcome them into deaf communities**



Hopeful arguments for sign language rights for all in the 21st century?

#wfd2019

Slides available at
<https://maartjedemeulder.be/slides/>

#wfd2019

References (1)

De Meulder, M., & Haualand, H. (2019) Sign language interpreting services: A quick fix for inclusion? *Translation and Interpreting Studies*.

De Meulder, M., & Birnie, I. (submitted). Language diaries as a research method in the study of language use and language choice: the case of Flemish Sign Language and Scottish Gaelic.

Hall, M. L., Hall, W. C., & Caselli, N. K. (2019). Deaf children need language, not (just) speech. *First Language*, 1-29.

Humphries, T., Kushalnagar, P., Mathur, G., Napoli, D. J., Rathmann, C., & Smith, S. (2019). Support for parents of deaf children: Common questions and informed, evidence-based answers. *International Journal of Pediatric Otorhinolaryngology*, 118), 134-142.

Kusters, A., & De Meulder, M. (2019). Language Portraits: Investigating Embodied Multilingual and Multimodal Repertoires. *FQS: Forum Qualitative Social Research*.

References (2)

Kymlicka, W., & Patten, A. (2003). *Language Rights and Political Theory*. Oxford University Press.

May, S. (2014). Contesting public monolingualism and diglossia: rethinking political theory and language policy for a multilingual world. *Language Policy*, 13(4), 371-393.

Wee, L. (2011). *Language without Rights*. Oxford University Press.

Thank you

Jan Adriaenssens

Hilde Haualand

Annelies Kusters

Jordan Fenlon

Joseph Murray

Bobbi Cordano

... for feedback on the ideas which informed this presentation