

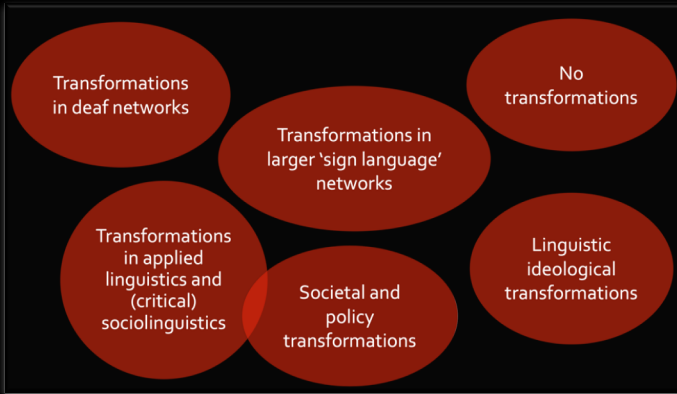
# Transformations in Deaf Studies

## Implications for sign language policy, revitalization and rights

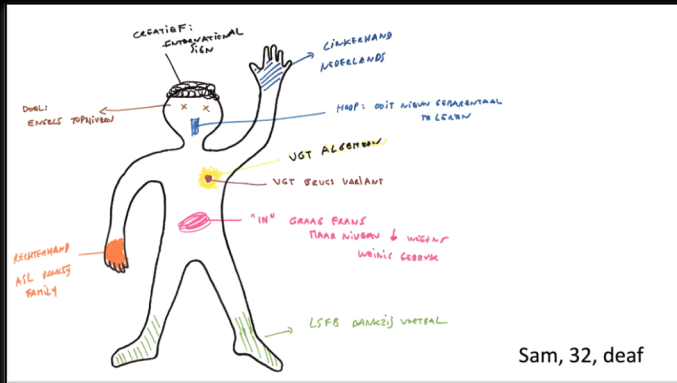
**Maartje De Meulder**

Gallaudet University — 2 November 2018

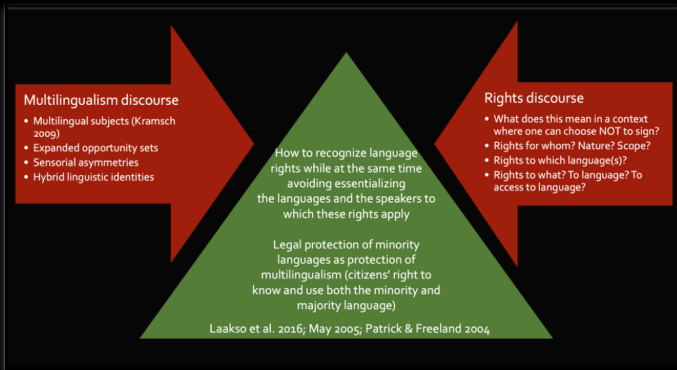




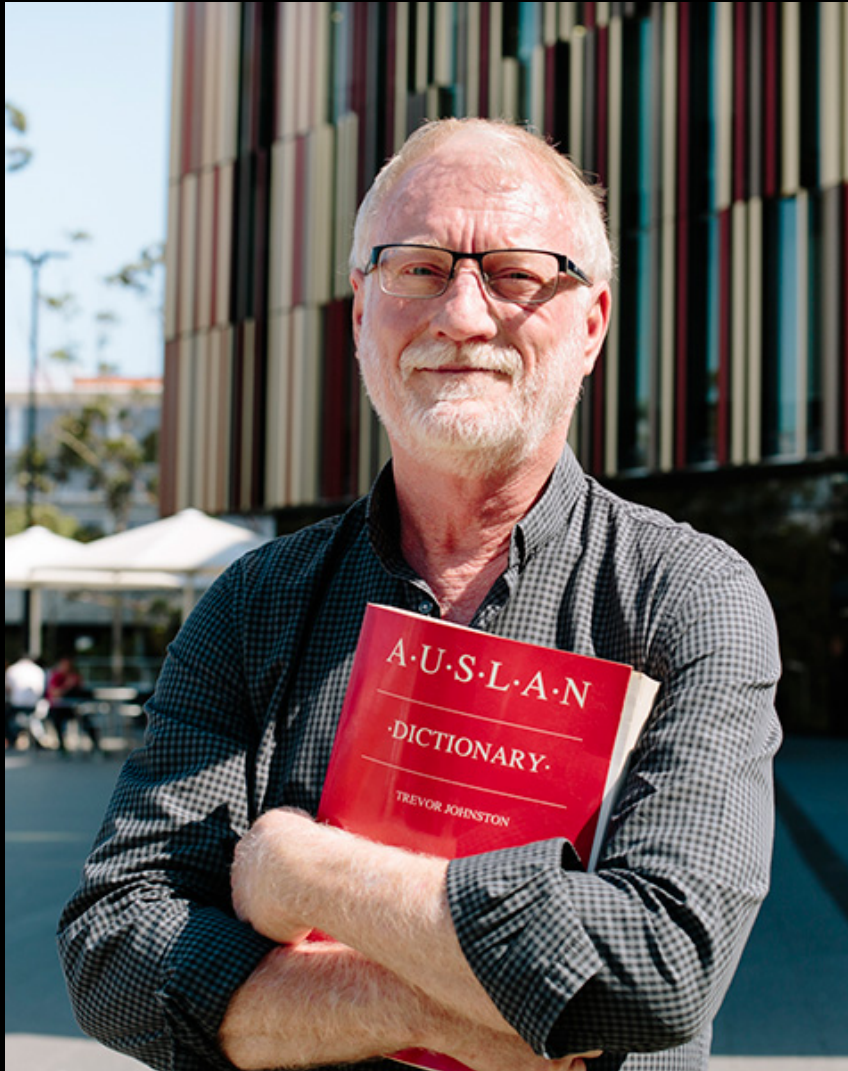
# Transformations



# New research lenses

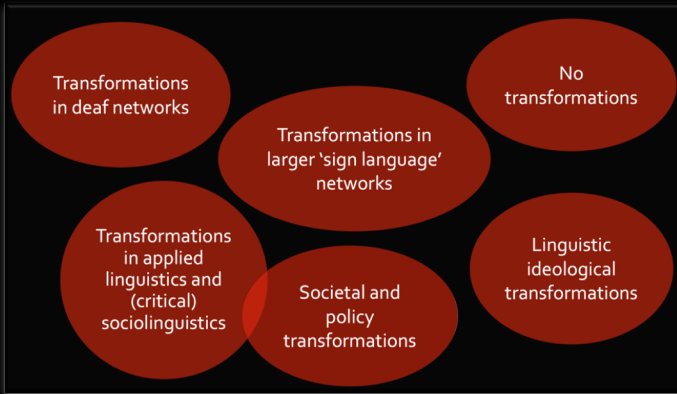


# Ways forward



(Johnston 2006: 165)

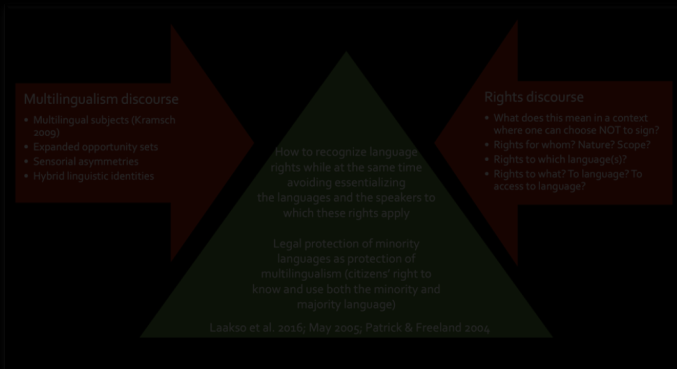
“There is no known way that the continued age and shrinking of a linguistic community without replacement by younger native users can support a viable language beyond the life spans of the current majority cohort, despite all the goodwill in the world.”



# Transformations



# New research lenses



# Ways forward

Transformations  
in deaf networks

No  
transformations

Transformations in  
larger 'sign language'  
networks

Transformations  
in applied  
linguistics and  
(critical)  
sociolinguistics

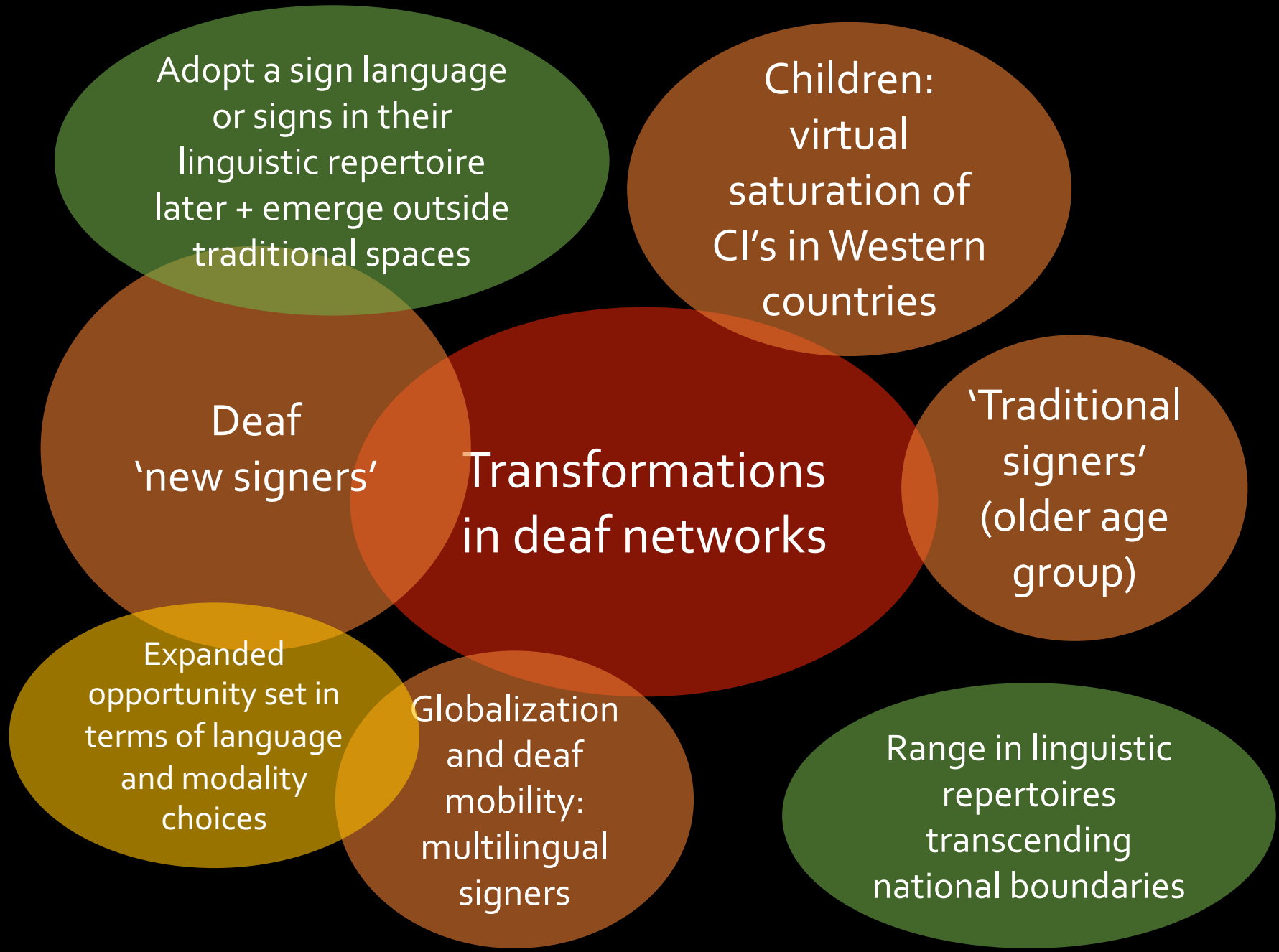
Societal and  
policy  
transformations

Linguistic  
ideological  
transformations

A large, solid red oval is positioned in the upper-left quadrant of the slide. It contains the text 'Transformations in deaf networks' in white, sans-serif font.

# Transformations in deaf networks

Access to visual modality compromised



Expanded representation of different groups of deaf signers

New signers "Not Even  
Related to Deaf"  
("NERDs")

Different  
motivations and  
investments

Transformations in  
larger 'sign language'  
networks

Hearing children in  
deaf and deaf/hearing  
families ("CODAs")

Globalization  
and deaf  
mobility

New signer  
parents

Access to visual modality  
and sign language  
compromised  
#whyisign



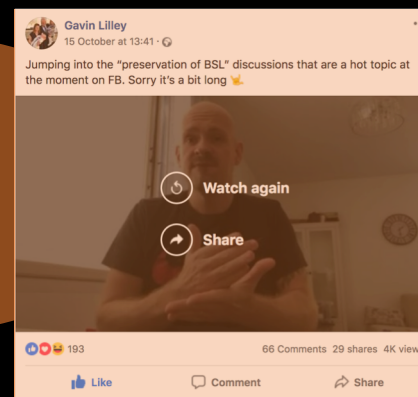
ASL purification  
debate



Linguistic  
ideological  
transformations /  
debates

"Sign language for  
everyone but not 'of'  
everyone"

Sign language  
"preservation"



'Linguistic moral  
panic' about  
language change  
(Heller & Duchêne  
2007)

Linguistic insecurity for  
new signers  
(motivation?)

# Unbalanced revitalization

Mainly targeted at hearing signers

## Deaf signers

Majority of deaf signers  
are new signers



## Hearing signers

Outnumber deaf signers

Critique of  
languages as  
bounded  
concepts

Languages as  
carriers of identity

Legal  
recognition of  
sign languages

Transformations in  
applied linguistics  
and (critical)  
sociolinguistics

Societal and policy  
transformations





Linguistic/semiotic  
repertoires and  
language practices

Sign languages  
are “endangered”

Name of Sign Language	Name of Contributor	Approximate Number of Users	Country	Level of Endangerment
Algerian Jewish Sign Language (AJSL)	Sara Lanesman and Irit Meir	50-100	Israel	1
Alipur Sign Language (APSL)	Sibaji Panda	10, 000	India	3
Al-Sayidd Bedouin Sign Language (ABSL)	Dr Shifra Kisch	1500	Israel	3
Austrian Sign Language (OGS)	Austrian Deaf Association (OGLB)	20, 000	Austria	4
Ban Khor Sign Language (BKSL)	Dr Angela Nonaka	403	Thailand	2
Brazilian Sign Language (Libras)	Ronice Muller de Quadros	Unknown	Brazil	4
Chican Sign Language (ChicanSL)	Cesar Ernesto Escobedo Delgado and Olivier Le Guen	349 (17 deaf, 332 hearing)	Mexico	2
Danish Sign Language	Danish Deaf Association	4-5000	Denmark	4
Ethiopian Sign Language (EthSL)	Eyasu H. Tamene	70, 000	Ethiopia	3
Finland- Swedish Sign Language (FinSSL)	Karin Hoyer and Janne Kankkonen	300	Finland	2
Inuit Sign Language	Joke Schuit	40	Canada	1
Kata Kolok	Dr Connie de Vos	1250	Indonesia	3
Mardin Sign Language (MarSL)	Hasan Dikyuva	40	Turkey	1
New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL)	Rachel McKee	24, 000	New Zealand	4
Yucatec Maya Sign Language (YMSL)- Nohkop variant	Olivier Le Guen	34	Mexico	2

## Adapted UNESCO's Endangered Languages Survey

- 1 = critically endangered
- 2 = severely endangered
- 3 = definitely endangered
- 4 = vulnerable

-  Limitations of national census data
-  Sociolinguistic information
-  Experts?
-  Ideologies?

[https://www.uclan.ac.uk/research/explore/projects/sign\\_languages\\_in\\_unesco\\_atlas\\_of\\_world\\_languages\\_in\\_danger.php](https://www.uclan.ac.uk/research/explore/projects/sign_languages_in_unesco_atlas_of_world_languages_in_danger.php)

No  
transformations

Arguments to promote  
sign languages and to achieve  
sign language rights

Dependency  
argument

Linguistic bind  
argument

Ideologies useful to promote  
sign languages in the past must  
be adapted

Transformations  
in deaf networks

No  
transformations

Transformations in  
larger 'sign language'  
networks

Transformations  
in applied  
linguistics and  
(critical)  
sociolinguistics

Societal and  
policy  
transformations

Linguistic  
ideological  
transformations

A yellow diamond-shaped sign with a black border, set against a blue sky with light clouds. The sign contains the text "Now what?" in a bold, black, sans-serif font, arranged in two lines.

**Now  
what?**

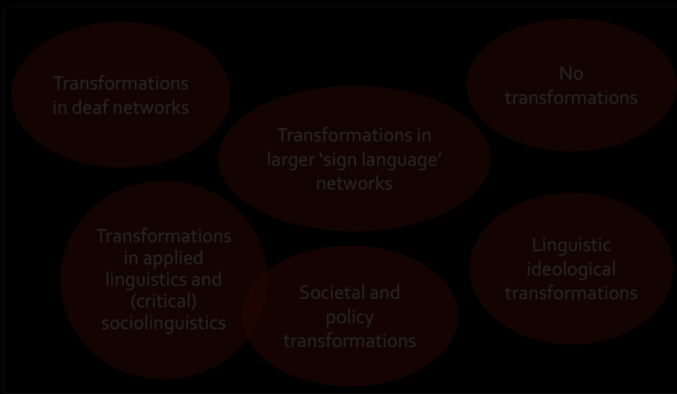
"We are curious about what it means to say a language 'dies' or 'disappears': what happened to change?"  
*(Heller & Duchêne 2007:3)*

"Speakers can change language (but languages need speakers)"  
*(Heller & Duchêne 2007:7)*

"Shift the focus away from the survival of named linguistic codes to the preservation of individual and collective access to the fullest possible repertoire of language practices"  
*(Jaffe 2007: 71)*

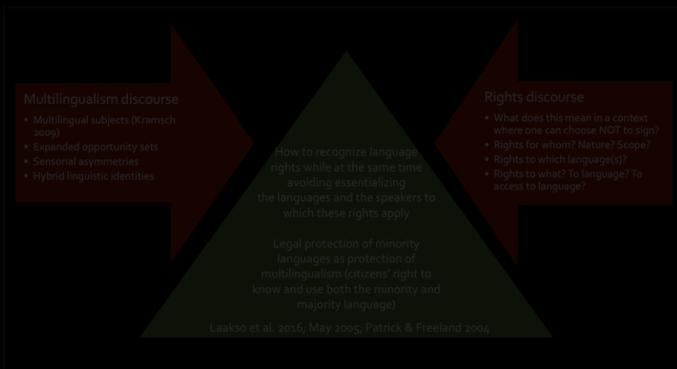
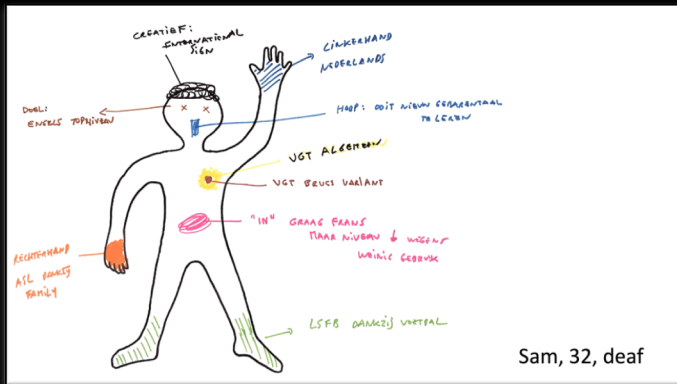
"Not necessarily attempting to bring the language back to former patterns of familial use but rather to bring the language forward to new users and uses"  
*(King 2001:26)*





# Transformations

# New research lenses



# Ways forward

# New research lenses

Language practices, motivations and ideologies of 10 deaf and 2 hearing signers in Flanders, Belgium (age 18-62)

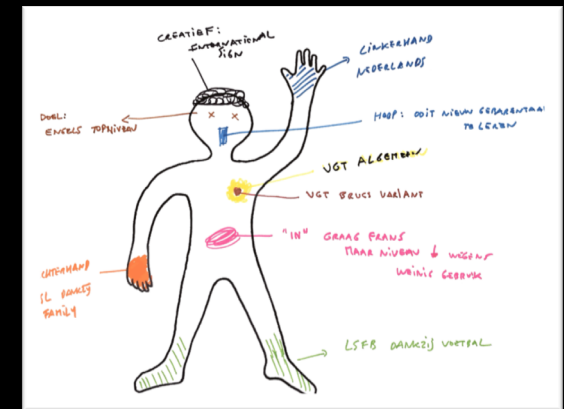
How these are linked to vitality of VGT  
Linguistic ethnographic methodology:



Interviews (language biographies, attitudes)

Uur	Taal	Plaats	Onderwerp (wat deed je)	Motivatie (doel/horend + leeftijd)	Opmerkingen
18.00 - 19.00	NED	bat	gesprek met zus en hulpwerk	Taanman (18) hulpwerk (18)	
8. - 11.00	NED + ENG	bat, audax	witlig prof (uitdaging in het licht school)	prof (1-10)	
11. - 11.30	NED	leven stad	gesprek met vriend, discussie, uitdagingen in nieuwe wereld		
11.00 - 11.30	NED	bat	gesprek met zus + stellen met vrienden	Taanman (18) vrienden (1-18)	
11.30 - 12.00	NED	PSI (psychologische hulpverlening)	DAL- coaching	hulpverleners (1-11)	
12.00 - 12.30	NED + ENG	bat	gesprek met zus	Taanman (18)	
12.30 - 13.00	NED	leven stad	opdrachtje bij de lichte gesprek met mate - studenten en "maken en pellen"	mede-studenten (1-11) maten = pellen (11)	
14.00 - 14.30	NED	fabriek industriële psychologische bijsp.	"	"	uitdaging met mate - lichte werk

Language use diaries (factors influencing language choice and use of semiotic repertoire)



Language portraits (12)

# Language use diaries

Dagboek		Datum: VR. 15/9.			
Uur	Taal	Plaats	Onderwerp (wat deed je)	Met wie (doof/horend + leeftijd)	Opmerkingen
16u45	gestures	kelder, bij lift	glas wegdoen	conjurie & zijn vrouw	goedeavond geknikt, hij moet of ik terug nu boven indert met lift (teken dat hij wou wachten) en. ik zie dat ik niet hoefde en ik weg ging.
17u00-18u30	NL	station & trein	whatsapp	meëndinnengroep (3 vrouwen, mijn leeftijdsgenoot)	↳ mee afgesproken vanavond
"	"	"	"	Maartje	↳ Al gaat in mond af
18u30-21u20	NL gesproken	in de auto onderweg nr mëndin & by mēdin thuis	babybeach	7 n.d. 8 meëndinner van de meëndinnengroep van Leven. + partner v. lēn van hen. mijn leeftijd	↳ groepspraak: moeilijke te volgen
21u20-21u45	NL gesproken	trein	onderweg nr lent	lēn n.d. yneëndinner. lēn-op-lēn gaat beter dan in groep. shapt af in Bxl.	↳ Al gaat meteen

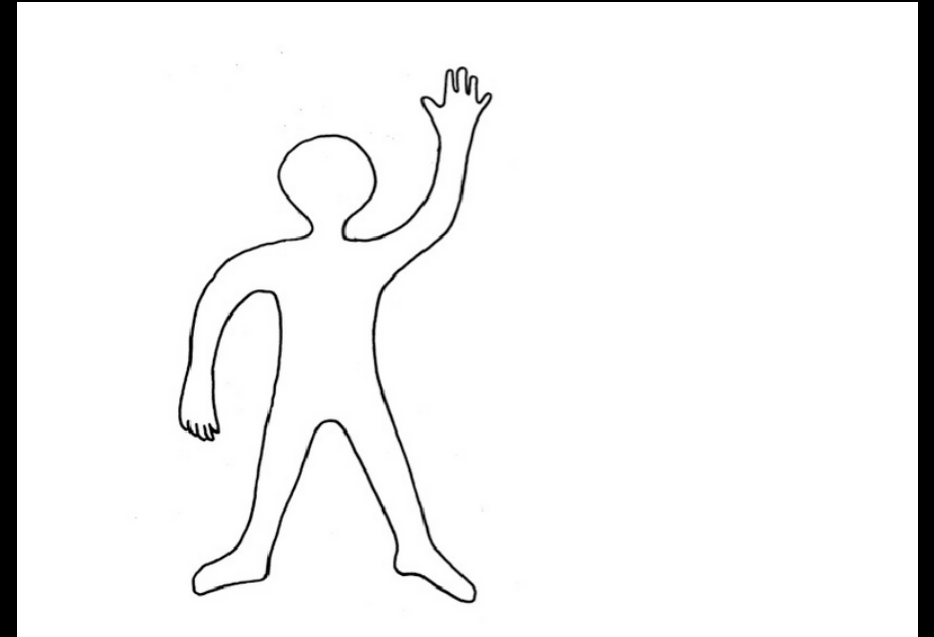
Determining factors influencing language choice and use of semiotic repertoire

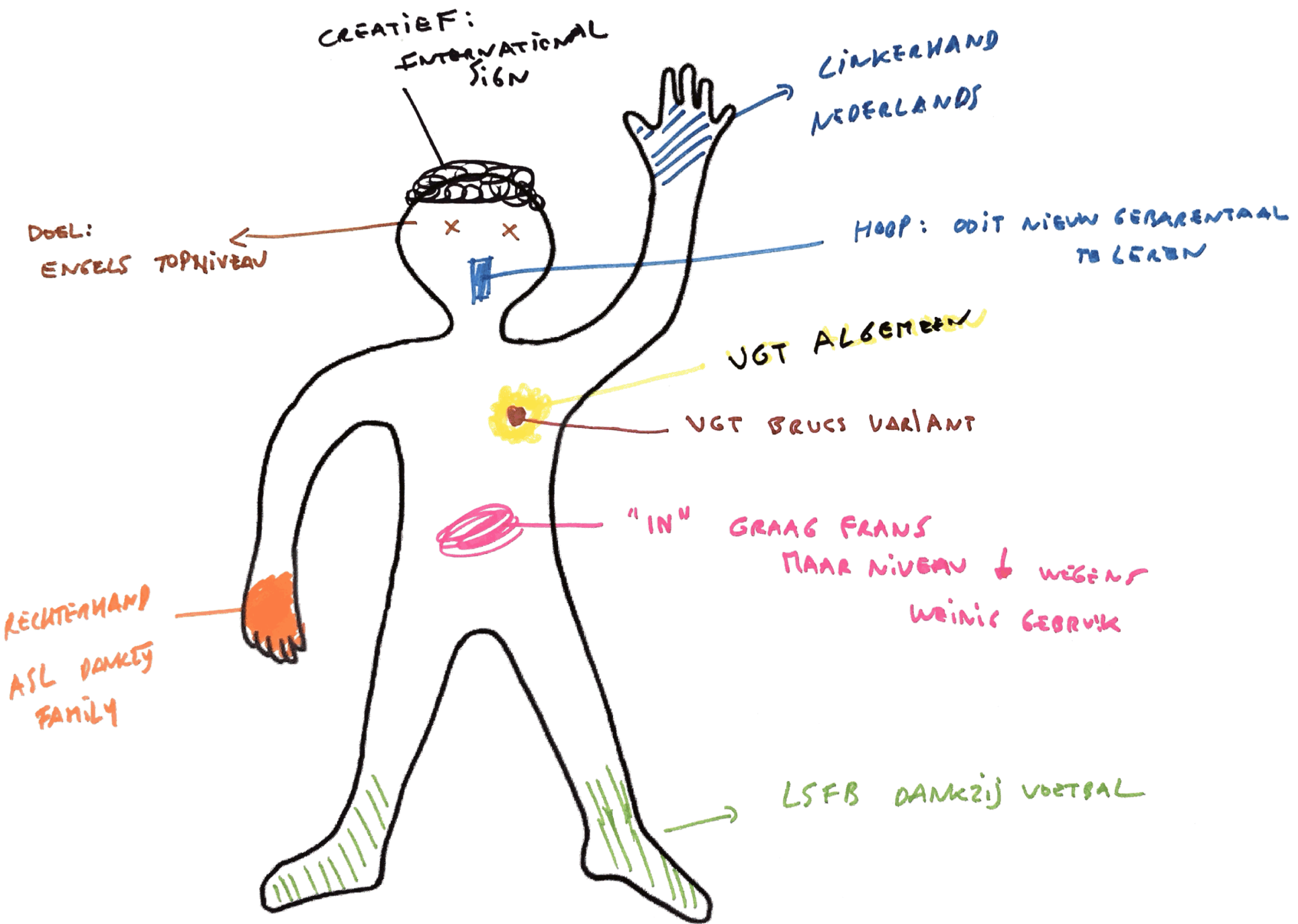
dag =

Dagboek		Datum: 02/10/17			
Uur	Taal	Plaats	Onderwerp (wat deed je)	Met wie (doof/horend + leeftijd)	Opmerkingen
08u30 - 08u50	NED	bot	gesprek met zus en kotgenoot	Tannekin (19) kotgenoot (22)	
9u - 11u	NED + ENG	les, aula	uitleg prof (inleiding in het hist. end.)	prof (± 30)	
11u - 14u	NED	Leuven stad	gesprek met vriend tijdens inkoop in diverse winkels		
14u2 - 14u30	NED	bot	gesprek met zus + chatten met vrienden	Tannekin (19) vrienden (± 10)	
14u30 - 16u30	NED	PSI (psycholooginst. instituut KU Leven)	PAL-coaching	Klangenoten (18) PAL-coaches (± 10)	
17u - 19u	NED + ENG	bot	gesprek met zus + engeltadige liedjes luisteren	Tannekin (19)	
19u30 - 21u30	NED	Leuven stad	gesprek met mede-studenten en "meter en peter"	medestudenten (± 10) meters = peters (± 10)	
21u30 - 00u00	NED	fabriek industriala = psychologische kring	"	"	verliep moeizamer door luide muziek maar bleek wel

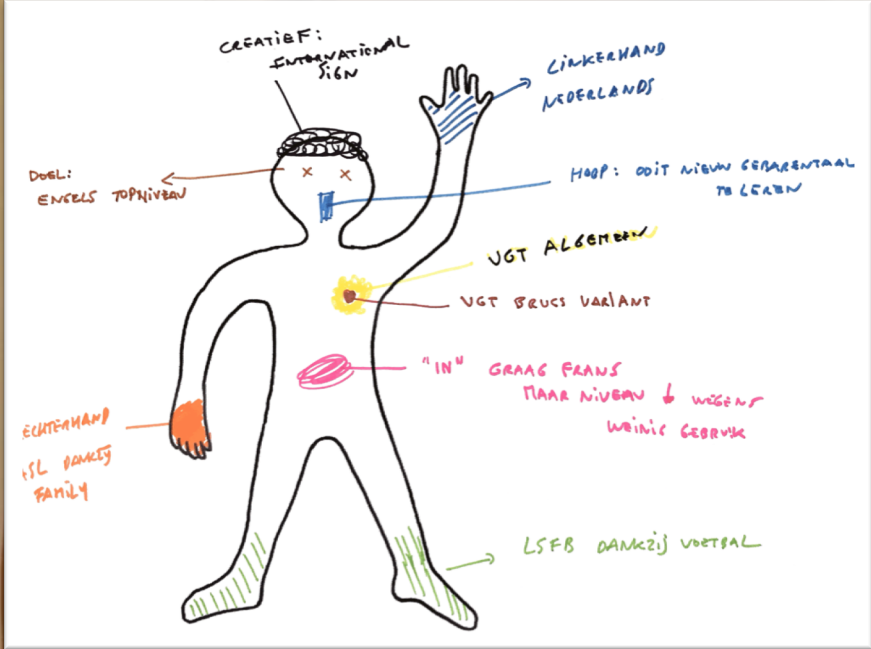
# Language portraits: why?

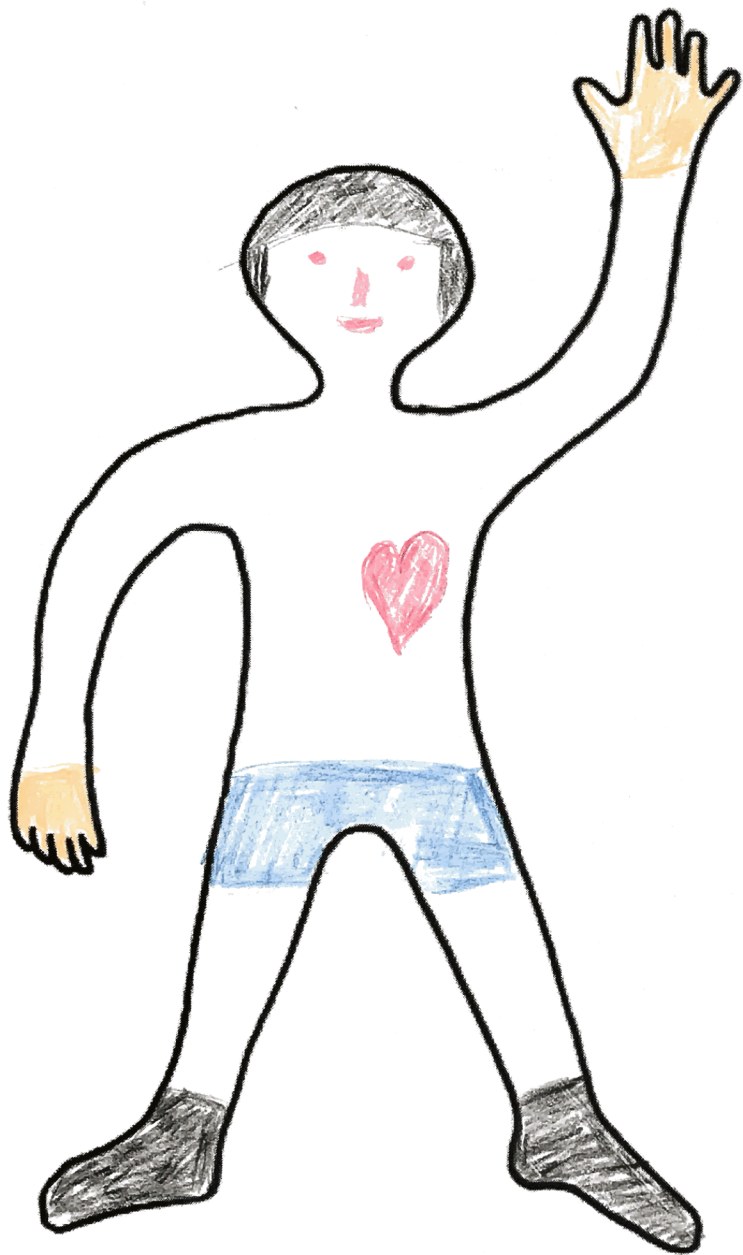
- Surpass limitations of vitality research // language dominance and competition (Lamarre 2013)
  - Visual methods underused in applied linguistics research in general and in Deaf Studies specifically (O'Brien & Kusters 2017)
- ✓ Rich multimodal research tools
    - ✓ Visual and narrative
  - ✓ "Us" and "them" become "me"
    - ✓ Shift in focus to idiosyncratic multilingual repertoire
  - ✓ Multilingual mosaic
    - ✓ Way around "L1", "L2" etc.



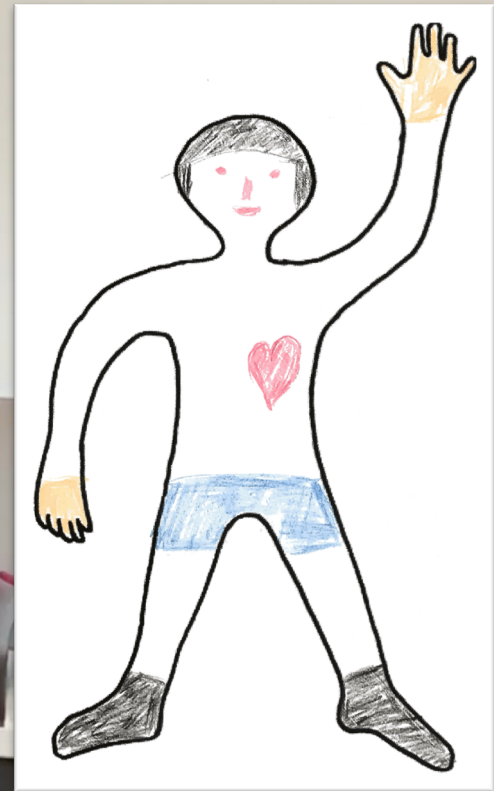


Sam, 32, deaf





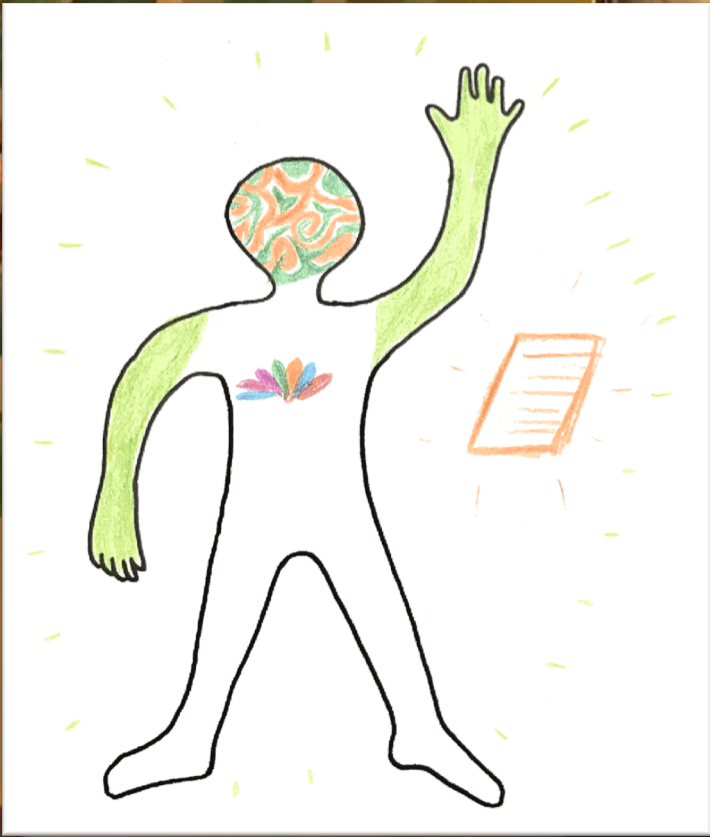
Ludo, 62, deaf



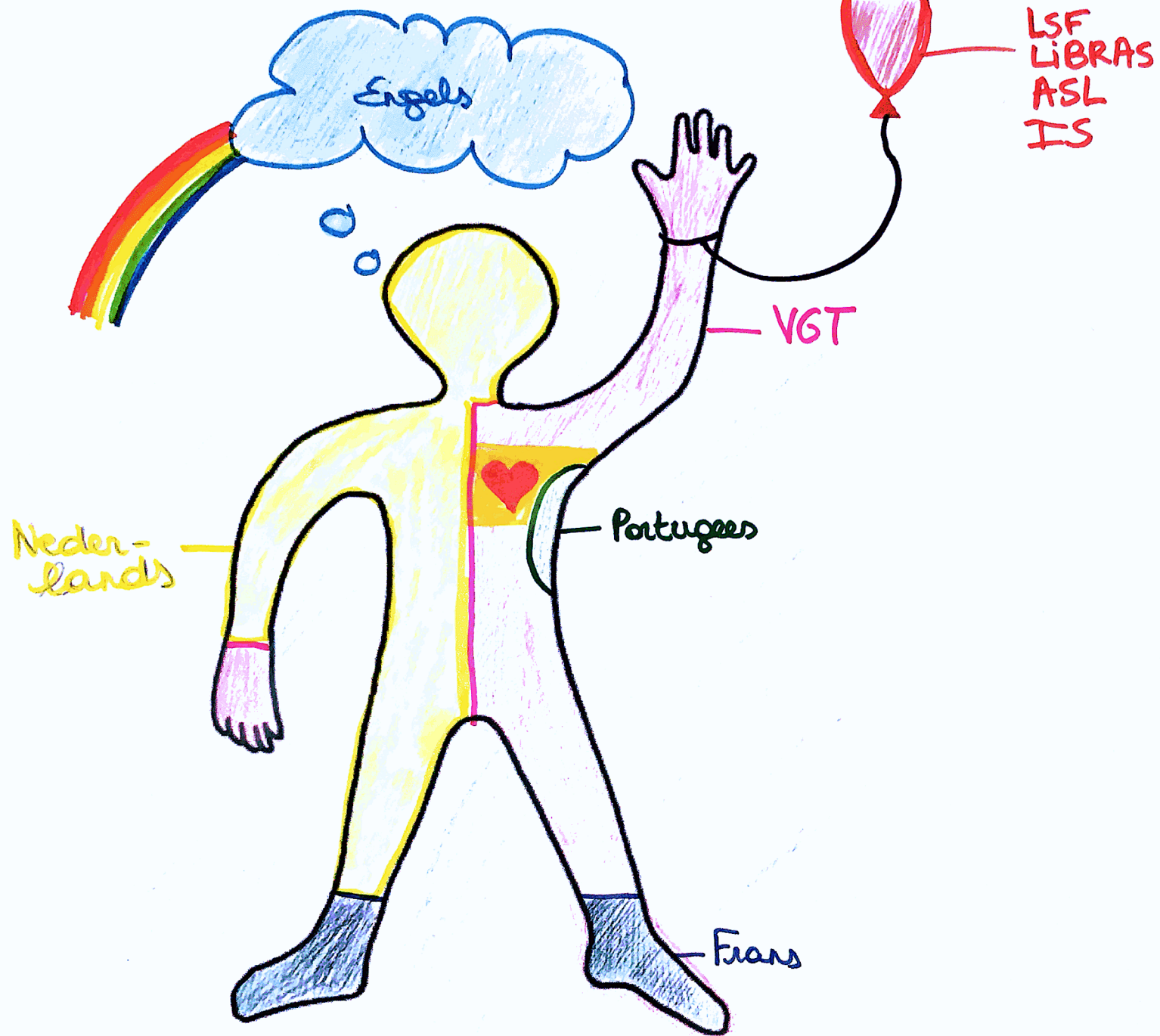




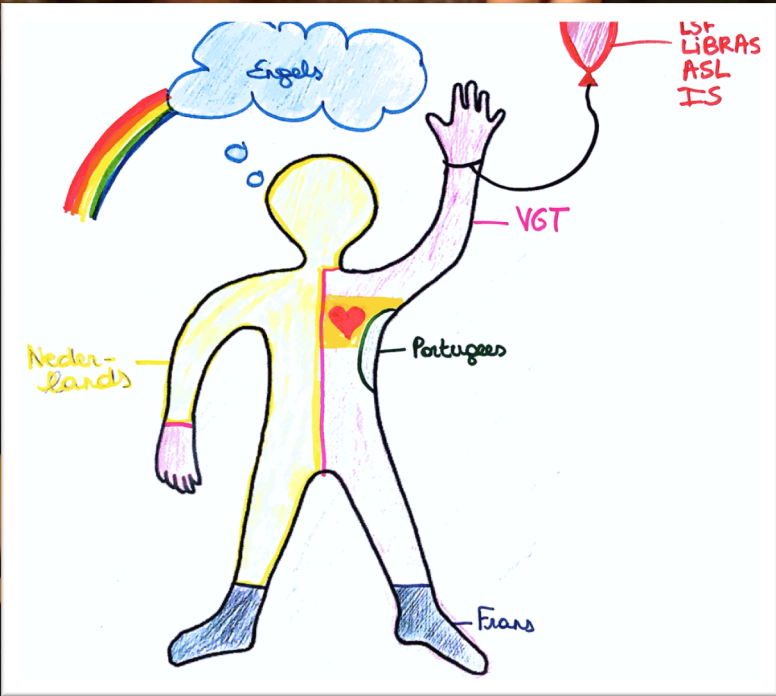
Marieke, 29, deaf



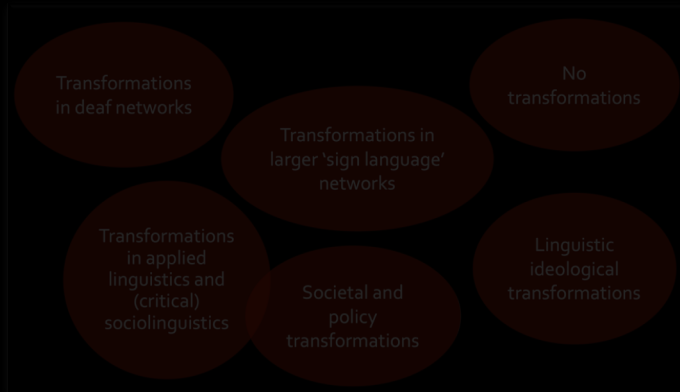
**ALWAYS BEEN IN ME  
USING MY HANDS**



Lena, 23, hearing



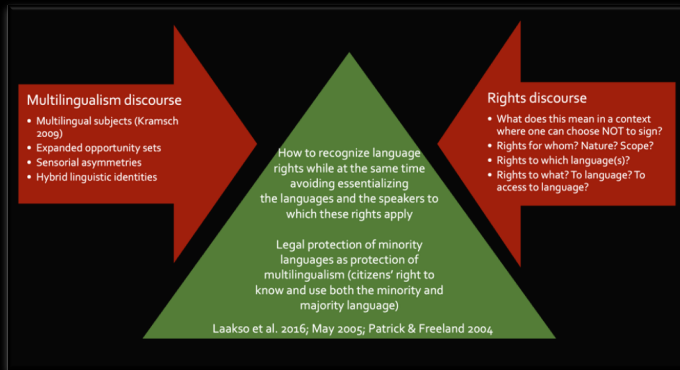
**Feet are not a nice place to me.  
I'd rather not see them.**



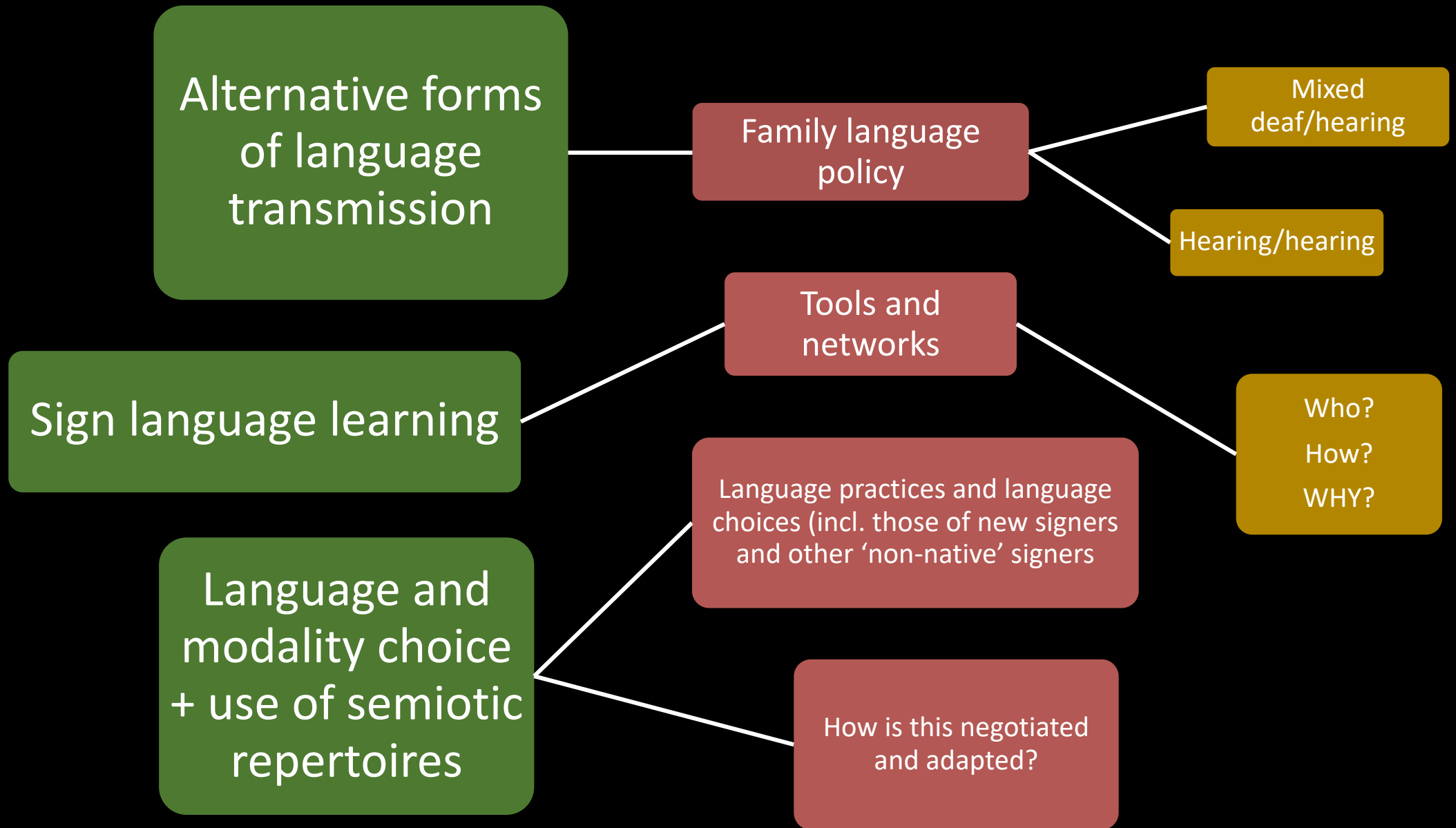
# Transformations



# New research lenses



# Ways forward



## Multilingualism discourse

- Multilingual subjects (Kramsch 2009)
- Expanded opportunity sets
- Sensorial asymmetries
- Hybrid linguistic identities

How to recognize language rights while at the same time avoiding essentializing the languages and the speakers to which these rights apply

Legal protection of minority languages as protection of multilingualism (citizens' right to know and use both the minority and majority language)

Laakso et al. 2016; May 2005; Patrick & Freeland 2004

## Rights discourse

- What does this mean in a context where one can choose NOT to sign?
- Rights for whom? Nature? Scope?
- Rights to which language(s)?
- Rights to what? To language? To access to language?

“[...] there is **no known way** that the continued age and **shrinking** of a **linguistic community** without **replacement** by younger **native users** can support a **viable language** beyond the life spans of the current majority cohort, **despite all the goodwill in the world**” (Johnston 2006: 165)

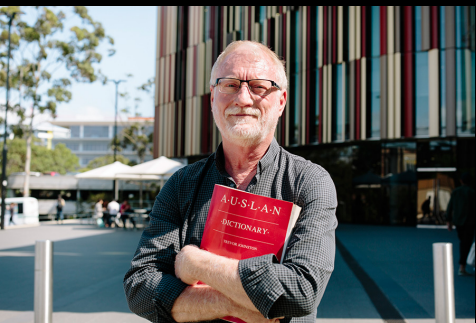
→ we just don't know yet?

→ changing?

→ expansion?

→ new users?

→ viable language practices?





<https://maartjedemeulder.be>

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