

## **From mandatory oralisation to deaf bilingualism: one achievement in process**

Terezinha Teixeira Joca<sup>1</sup>, Ana Rebeca Medeiros Nunes de Oliveira<sup>2</sup>,  
Marilene Calderaro Munguba<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*Universidade de Fortaleza, Programa de Apoio Psicopedagógico, Av. Washington Soares, 1321, Fortaleza, Ceará, Brasil*

<sup>2</sup>*Universidade de Fortaleza, Programa de Apoio Psicopedagógico, Av. Washington Soares, 1321, Fortaleza, Ceará, Brasil*

<sup>3</sup>*Universidade Federal do Ceará, Fortaleza, Ceará, Brasil. Centro de Humanidades, no Departamento de Letras Libras e Estudos Surdos, Av. da Universidade, 2683, Fortaleza, Ceará, Brasil*

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**Abstract:** This study figures as an essay on the progress of deaf people regarding the mandatory oralisation proposed by the bilingual school. As a purpose, it suggests a reflection about the path of deaf people on the conquering a bilingual school, as a continuous process. As a qualitative study, it aims to explain in an argumentative way about this process, as well as how the bilingualism occurs today. This study was conducted from January to April, 2019. Based on the Skliar, Strobel, Perlin, Quadros and Joca's theoretical basis, it aimed the comprehension of deaf people's progress, from the punishment for trying to communicate naturally using the signals language, to the conquering of the use of Libras (Brazilian Sign Language) on social and educational spaces. Also, it proposes a reflection about a community which has been over the domain of the hearing culture. As a result, it intends to make contributions to the deaf community, educational proposals, family and educational members as a whole.

**Key-words:** Bilingualism, deaf, education, oralisation.

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### **1. Introduction**

Until the mid-1990s, deafness was predominantly perceived by the biomedical view, as a lack of ability, whereas the major effort from the family and professionals was to make deaf people speak, expressing through their voice. And, "with the insistent aim to demutize the deaf, teachers largely adopted the oralisation method (lip-reading), grasped in the specialization courses" (LEITÃO, 2008, p.110).

It is noticeable, then, the long way of struggling of the deaf in order to communicate in their first language, the signs. In the XXI century, education for deaf people had remarkable advances, however, it is noted that their insertion on regular school showed to be full of difficulties, and, in a certain way, excluding. As states Stumpf [1]:

The inclusion was, for the previously excluded majority, a door that had been opened. The classrooms, nevertheless, may not make us proud. It is a tough work for a complex situation and the inclusive school is still far from being a satisfactory place for the deaf.

Likewise, the bilingual school is also in progress, as it is far from what it should be. "The change of a social paradigm makes emerge a challenging and contradictory educational context" [2], which has to consider diversity and the various modalities of learning. Moreover, it requires opening and flexibility when coping with differences.

In this moment, in order to make the tough way and the achievements of deaf people, this study shows itself as an essay on the progress of deaf people regarding the mandatory oralisation proposed by the bilingual school. In addition, it aims a reflection about the path of deaf people on the conquering a bilingual school, as a continuous process. As a qualitative study, it aims to explain in an argumentative way about this process, as well as how the bilingualism occurs today. With relevance for the deaf community and society in general, it attempts to bring a mindful reflection about a group that has lived a long time marginalised.

### **2. Brief historical background**

Deaf people, their language and culture, have faced many barriers and the achievements for the use of their sign language have been through a constant struggle. Joca [3] affirms that,

This barrier against the expression of the deaf is centenary. Already in 1880, at the International Congress of Deaf Educators that occurred in Milan, approximately 180 people were present, with the majority

being hearing, representatives from various countries, they had the objective of discuss about the deaf education and to analyse how they should be educated, whether through the oral or gestural language methodology, among other subjects.

Such event became a great mark on deaf history, as it was decided for the prohibition of the sign language use and this decision lasted for almost a hundred years. Although, some have never stopped their studies.

Thus, the deaf language was continuously regarded as merely gestures and mimics, not being properly accepted as a language, besides being prohibited. When, in the 60's, from the studies of Stokoe (1919-2000), an American linguist, the sign language started being studied as an authentic language, and it was slowly becoming recognized worldwide as a natural language, with the same characteristics as the other ones.

Brazil is historically regarded as a monolingual country, however, "monolingualism is more an exception than a rule, and some type of relation with more than one language involves the great majority of population in the globe" [4]. This monolingualistic perspective has been conducted through barriers, also for the design of Brazilian language politics.

The authors also emphasize that Brazil stands for the country that holds the population with the greatest language diversity. This is because there are approximately 200 languages being used as first languages by natives, besides the Portuguese. Among them, nearly 170 indigenous languages, many immigration languages and still two sign languages – Libras and the Sign languages of the indigenous tribe Urubu Kaapor.

Among the historical marks and achievements of deaf individuals, the Brazilian Sign Language - Libras' regulation started in 1993, however, it only became recognised in 2002, according to the Law nº 10.436. After, in 2005, the Decree nº 5.626 determined Libras as a mandatory discipline for some courses, including phonoaudiology. Besides this, for the other courses from higher education and professional courses, it is included as an optative discipline [5]. It may be seen that the bilingualism proposal for the deaf education denotes nuances to be observed.

With regard to the enrolment of deaf students in common schools, the bilingual education – Portuguese language/Libras, develops the teaching in both languages, the teaching of Portuguese language as a second language in the written modality to deaf students, the Libras and Portuguese's translator/interpreter services as well as Libras' teaching to the other students [6].

#### **About these suggestions, Stumpf [1] analyses:**

The solution proposed by MEC is simplistic, authoritarian and has no acceptance by the deaf, apart from its efficacy not being attested. Deaf schools were very criticised by its lacks and not valued by its role played, which was the only alternative to the deaf for years.

Still, in the mid-2010, in the apex of the Brazilian Deaf Movement, a regression in relation to the respect and acceptance towards deaf people's culture and education was noticeable, during the Education National Conference – CONAE 2010, where the elaboration of the Education National Plan - PNE was proposed, and the proposal of the deaf community was rejected, even with their representatives being present. In their studies, Campello and Rezende [7] present the deaf proposal:

Assurance to deaf people and their families of the right to opt for the most suitable modality of learning for the complete linguistic, cognitive, emotional, psychic, social and cultural development of children, young and adults, ensuring the free access to the bilingual education – using the Brazilian Sign Language (LIBRAS) and the Portuguese language.

The proposal above strongly claimed that education for disabled people should occur in regular school, what seemed to be an important advance, but was in fact a paradox, once there was not an analysis of disabled people's specificities, as well as with regard to the unprepared teachers and even the institution to receive the diverse demands. Questions as how teachers and the educational team would communicate with deaf students and how the classes would be carried in order to contemplate blind, deaf and learning disability students were raised.

Joca [3] states that, in the year of the conference there was considerable debate around this decision, in all Brazilian states. In May 2010, in the Legislative Assembly of Ceará, a debate about "inclusive education politics in the state of Ceará" took place, with proposals for a variety of disabilities, which emphasized the disabled people's rights, where deaf were present and brought the specificities of the sign language and the unpreparedness of schools to welcome them, besides claiming the guarantee of public places access with the use of their language. Then, it was noted the need for more specific discussions about the deaf people education. So, with the claims, in November 2011, in the State Public Prosecutor's Office it was held an audience on "The inclusive education with emphasis in the deaf education". With around 500 participants, being the majority deaf, strong discussions based on life experiences occurred, and it became a mark on the history of the Brazilian deaf movement.

Currently in Brazil, LIBRAS is considered a “natural language with all the complexity inherent to the linguistic systems that support communication and thinking of people who possess the faculty of communication” [8], and, in Portugal, Pereira [9] adds: “The gestural language of each country is an instrument through which things are named, ourselves are named, past and future are distinguished, and our existence encounters a meaning”.

Nevertheless, it should be considered that, it was not a fast change from a scale of mean attitudes towards deaf people in order to make them speak, to reaching the proposals of respect towards their sign language. It is necessary to emphasize that the definition of oralism as a more suitable educational methodology, at that time, was based on the idea that the deaf did not have the capacity to opt about their own education. “Remembering that until the last century, not very long ago, a deaf person would have to use the oralisation method and, for this, embarrassing actions were commonly taken, such as tying or even hitting children’s hands in order to prohibit the use of gestures” [3]. Considering oralism as a method that focuses on the learning of the oral language, and that the deaf individual, even not counting on the audition sense, has the ability of acting as a speaker of the oral language. Therefore, Bisio [10] states that “the oralist approach is based on the comprehension that the auditive rehearsal would enable the deaf’s access to the speech. In the bilingualism, the approach is a language whose materiality is visual-spatial”.

Still, it is important to mention that the Brazilian Law of Inclusion [11] in its IV Chapter – Right to Education, Art. 28, ensures “offer of bilingual education, in Libras as a first language and in the written modality of the Portuguese language as a second one, in schools and bilingual classes and inclusive schools.” So, from 2015, as a result of discussions and documentations elaborated by the Brazilian deaf movement, the bilingual education must be offered rightfully in the national territory.

### **3. The deaf bilingualism**

Whether on common sense or on some academy areas, “the mistaken idea is that one language leads to the non-use of the other, and in this case, ‘subtracts’. Therefore, the teaching of languages with quality is not encouraged, the Brazilian linguistic multiplicity is not brought inside the scholar space” [12]. This has been applied to the sign languages, still seen as languages that exercise a substitutive function in relation to the oral-auditive language.

Although, the term bilingualism involves the competence and the performance in two distinct languages, and this may be individual or collective. When reflecting about the deaf community, Fernandes and Moreira [13] affirm that, deaf might be considered bilingual when mastering two authentic Brazilian languages, because both express values, beliefs and ways of perception of reality from people who share national cultural elements.

As deaf individuals coexist with, at least, two cultures – the major one and the deaf culture, it is valid to mention the deaf culture, which according to Strobel [14]:

It is the deaf way of understanding the world and of modifying it in order to make it accessible and habitable, adjusting it according to their visual perceptions, which contribute to the identification of the deaf identities and of the deaf communities’ “souls”. This includes the language, ideas, beliefs, and habits of the deaf community.

The communicational demands of deaf people point out to the development of bilingual abilities. This is because “deaf see the language that others produce by looking, by the hands, facial expressions and by the body. It is a language seen on the other” [15]. In this context, it is identified the relevance of Libras to the Brazilian deaf community, and the necessary subordination of the Portuguese language to Libras.

With regard to bilingual models, it is identified two important ones, as pointed by the author Kozlowski [16]: Successive Model: where the Sign Language is the first language (L1) and the Portuguese language, in the written modality, is the second (L2); Simultaneous Model: the Sign Language is the first (L1) and the Portuguese language, in the oral modality, is the second (L2). For a better comprehension of these models, it is necessary to understand that there are diverse deaf identities, as stated by Sacks [17], Skliar [18] and Perlin [19].

The Successive Model has shown to be the most appropriate to the signaling deaf, exclusive because the written modality of the auditive oral language of the country demands visual-spatial and visual-motor abilities, inherent to the deaf due to their visuality; used on direct communication deaf-deaf and through it, the student develops socially and emotionally.

On the other hand, the Simultaneous Model has shown to be more suitable to the oralised deaf, because they developed speech and lip-reading abilities, familiarities with the auditive oral language.

Slomski [20] and Fernandes and Moreira [13] point out that there are countless types of bilingualism and also emphasize that with regard to deaf people, what suits more is the diglossal bilingualism, in which “both languages fill different functions to the individual; a relation that is far from uncommon among the bilingual

individuals or bilingual societies” [21]. This type of bilingualism involves a linguistic situation in which two languages are in a complementary relation, being one language used in occasions that the other is not.

#### **4. The bilingual schools**

Difference is an aspect that integrates life, realised in the moment of encounter with others. However, commonly, according to the way it is presented and coped with, it may promote social tensions, or even marginalise some individuals. The cultural differences and the way they are presented e perceived in the world are historical and social constructions. According to Skliar and Quadros [22], “differences exist regardless of acceptance, respect, authorisation, tolerance, oficialisation or granted permission since normality”. Difference simply exists, considering that “the differences constitute the human, once the human does not exist if it is not in the field of differences social-historically constructed” [23].

The linguistic prejudice displays in an important way in the Brazilian educational context, and frequently, it is the school itself the place for this prejudice against those who do not comprehend the Portuguese language.

When thinking about the deaf education, it is possible to recognise the concept of culture, now in the theoretical scope of Cultural Studies and Deaf Studies. Cultural Studies indicate culture as a “production field of meanings in which the different social groups, placed on different power positions, fight for their meaning impositions to outer society” [24]. Marques [23] adds:

The conceptual attribution of culture for the deaf people groups had a successful itinerary between these people. Unsatisfied, until then, for being considered “inferior” people, the Cultural Studies granted them the right to be different, to signify an identity politically marked and invented from the deaf people groups.

This identity has influence, in a decisive way, on the discussion about curriculum. In this perspective, the curriculum consists of a social construction, as “a fight field around signification and identity” [24], in favour of the socially invisible minorities. Associated to the Cultural Studies, in the researches about curriculum, deaf researchers and listeners started to organise the Deaf Studies, that Lunardi [26] defines as:

a group of conceptions of linguistic order, multicultural and anthropological, as are these that present a relation with knowledge of the deaf world. Getting closer to a point means distancing from the other, therefore, in this definition the marks of audiology and the auditive disabilities are reinterpreted.

Thus, the focus of the discussion is dislocated from the clinical perspective to the social-anthropological view of deafness. So, the association of these theoretical marks leads to the discussion about the deaf curriculum, which is constituted amongst power relations from the shift of a clinical view to the deaf identities and the construction of deaf history and culture. Andreis-Witkoski [27] emphasizes that “the deaf curriculum needs to contemplate the history, identity, culture, language of the deaf, inside the curriculum, in the same way the listener needs to have inside what is from the deaf”. Only this way, deaf people will have their specificities contemplated.

According to Quadros [28] the scholar inclusion politics aims to support education to everyone. However, the nomination “Education to Everyone” brings with it one globalized and homogeneous education where the majority prevails. In the majority and minority relation, the minor group is generally affected by inferiority and irrelevance feelings, characterizing then, the exclusion. Frequently the inclusion politics aims to involve the excluded group to the majority, when in reality the minority has specific needs. In general, the “included” group is only geographically inserted on the school space, however, it keeps being excluded in all aspects.

Therefore, in the educational aspect, “deaf schools have an extra duty on the development of students’ first language, once the majority does not have the sign language as a mother language, in the very exact meaning of the word” [21]. As the majority of deaf people are born in hearing families, the scholar community holds a relevant function, of both using the sign language as a mediation tool for learning, as well as promoting the day-to-day contact with natives of the language, especially with deaf adults, identities references.

When analysing deaf bilingualism, it is important to comprehend about the concept of difference. That cannot be taken in a timeless and decontextualised way. This difference reveals also on their culture and their respective artifacts, that for Strobel [14] are constituted by the visual experience, Linguistic artifact (sign language), Familiar artifact, Deaf literature, Social and sportive life, Visual arts, Politics, Materials/Technology.

We will recover the comprehension of bilingual school from what is preconized in educational politics:

To the students’ enrolment in common schools, the bilingual education – Portuguese language/Libras develops the scholar teaching in Portuguese and in the sign language, the teaching of Portuguese as a second language in the written modality to deaf students, the services of Libras and Portuguese’s translator/interpreter and the teaching of Libras to the remaining students in the school [6].

The bilingual model is characterised, especially, by the protagonism of the sign language. This is considered not only a tool or a way of achieving better results in teaching. On the contrary, it is regarded as a first language by the students, with everything that relates to it" [21]. Today, the deaf inclusion educational proposals are taking place, and well as the implementation of bilingual schools to this population. Referring to the inclusive education, Andreis-Witkoski (2017, p.185) affirms:

the inclusion of deaf people, comparing to other groups, is a differentiated concept, once it is based, basically, on linguistic and cultural distinctions, what requires the teaching to be organised, either in the linguistics or methodologically. And only in a naturally bilingual environment, they will be allowed to construct themselves as individuals that possess the Sign language as a first language.

It is still an utopia, especially because the members of the Brazilian deaf community, in general, agree that the initial years of deaf education should be held in bilingual schools, for being naturally bilingual environments, and from the Primary School II these may utilise the inclusion in an adequate way, since this would take place in bilingual contexts. However, "the narratives about the deaf scholar inclusion practices ignore the educational potentiality from an environment linguistically favourable" [30].

It has to be considered, as Lima and Campos [31] stated, that there are two types of education with basis on the identity specificities from the deaf:

[...] the bilingual/cultural inclusion and intercultural inclusion. The bilingual/cultural inclusion is the one where the deaf are inserted inside the hearing school, with hearing classmates, but in that space prevails the deaf culture with methodologies/curriculum adapted to the visual experience. (...) Meanwhile, the intercultural inclusion offers to the deaf their own space of studies inside the hearing school, counting on bilingual teachers, some elements from the deaf culture.

In the first type of inclusion, it may be emphasized the presence of deaf and hearing teachers, both bilingual, and of the sign language interpreters in the mediation of the students' learning, aiming for a balance between the two cultures in the educational context.

Thus, in the context of deaf bilingual education, there is a demand for the application of Visual Pedagogy and Deaf Pedagogy, which favour their visual experiences, based on their visuality.

By Visual Pedagogy it may be understood, according to Lacerda, Santos and Caetano [32], that it follows social and technological advances, the tendencies of the Visuality Society. It is clear that, in the deaf education context, it applies along with Deaf Pedagogy, that uses the visual experiences in/from the sign language, with emphasis on the deaf culture and its artifacts.

Deaf Pedagogy is depicted as "a new perspective of bilingual education which evokes the sign language and comes from the deaf people themselves, through resistance movements [33]. In this perspective, this pedagogy reaffirms the deaf individuals' protagonism when proposing the education that it identified as the most adequate for their cultural and identity specificities. Santana, Muniz and Peixoto [34] emphasize that it is configured the demonstration of a desire for a major protagonism and cultural representation in the educational politics.

As the language constitutes a cultural artifact, the use of these modalities enables the perfect development of the deaf students, including their identities. Furthermore, it is important to observe that "the sign language and the oral language are not in opposition – instead, they present different channels" [10].

### **5. The deaf achievements in higher education spaces**

The deaf education in Child Education proposes that the teacher interacts with the child, as well as in the Primary School, however, from the advance in the years, a gap is started concerning the teacher-student and student-student communication. About the sign language interpreters services as mediators of the communication Libras-Portuguese and Portuguese-Libras. Therefore, the proposal of ensuring the Libras communication to deaf students in Higher Education Institution – IES, requires the interpreter on this mediation.

The need of the knowledge of the sign language has conquered spaces, until the Libras discipline started to be required as mandatory in superior courses that involve teaching, and as optative in the others. About this need of the language knowledge, Quadros and Stumpf [35] state that a preparation in a more elevated level, that does not restricts only to communication, is needed.

In order to guarantee inclusion and the bilingualism, the institution, the group and the educators must be prepared, with the adequate subjects and methodologies. So, it is necessary that the teachers verify ways of addressing the students towards their educational needs, revealing specific singularities of each individual.

The discussion about the curriculum needs to be reevaluated now, in the Higher Education context. Deaf people face numerous challenges in the university space, especially concerning the attitudinal, communicational, and digital accessibility. The document from the Education Ministry, Evaluation Instrument of Undergraduate

Courses – Presential and Distance Learning [36], establishes the accessibility as a variable that crosses all areas to be evaluated in the IES.

Even so, there is no guarantee that the deaf accessibility is effective in the IES. According to Alves [36],

many deaf individuals who enter university courses cannot conclude the graduation, as they face numerous difficulties in this process, mostly related to language issues. In the current educational context, there is a fight for the deaf individuals inclusion, not as passive subjects, but, as active subjects in the process of formal education of his peers.

So, the fact that the deaf have access to IES needs to be followed by analysis and the planning of permanence strategies of the student that, as said previously, has culture and linguistic specificities. Munguba [38] affirms that,

[...] the interaction, the welcoming of culture and way of being of each person are tools in the mediation of the world comprehension, with diversity, rich in colours and nuances, showing the urge to an attitude change, either from the person who teaches as from the one who learns, focused on the participation as actors.

In face of this, it may be perceived that the Libras interpreter's presence is necessary, seeing that the majority of IES students is composed by hearing people; which enables the deaf culture to start to permeate the day-to-day of the university community, either through the Libras discipline as L2 teaching, or through the divulgation of the deaf culture and its artifacts, in order to a greater number of people start to identify the deaf people's specificities. The presence of the deaf teacher and the bilingual hearing teacher exercises a key role on this divulgation. On the other hand, "only" the insertion of the Libras interpreter in the university activities is not a guarantee of accessibility for the deaf.

In relation to the Libras discipline, the Decree 5.626/05, previously commented, determines that "[...] deaf people have priority to minister the Libras discipline" [5]. Thus, besides the deaf student, it is given the opportunity for the deaf to assume primarily the management of the class. In order for this to happen, "during the explanations about Libras specificities, made by the deaf teacher, it is an interpreter's role to be the channel of communication between teacher and student [39].

Still, it is necessary to reflect about the formation of the deaf teacher, as stated by Machado [40],

(...) more than a technical and practical attitude, the formation of deaf people's teachers implies an esthetics choice when thinking about the life experiences, and the attitudes that must be taken, once they are directly related with the deaf movements and with the fights implemented by this minority group.

Today, it is possible to identify inside the IES, groups of bilingual students communicating in Libras with the deaf, without the use of mediation by the interpreter, which points to a new time. This phenomenon has been common on the teaching-related courses, Libras and Bilingual Pedagogy, in which the deaf culture is present, either in the educators' space or in the students, with the presence of Libras natives in both. This day-to-day contact has led to the search of a pedagogical praxis that suits the specificities of the bilingual student. This allows us to believe that "the visibility of cultural differences is also an aspect favoured by the deaf differences. In Brazil, deaf people started to occupy social and university spaces, what turns the differences more visible than before" [41].

### **Considerations**

The educational process of inclusion is subjected to the society's change of values. However, including everyone in the same process, means excluding. The valorisation of the difference is necessary for the ideal integration and inclusion. In order to the educational system benefits both majority and minority groups, it has to be based on a plan that welcomes the differences, considering political, cultural, social and linguistic aspects.

We emphasize that the Brazilian deaf movement has showed to be effective, either in the discussions around educational politics, or in the incentive to researches that could support these discussions, with the deaf protagonism.

We recognise that bilingual education is still in development and, even though it has support, it is necessary to get familiar with each person's specificities, each student, seeing that not everyone reaches school with the domain of the sign language, and this is another point to be worked on. Furthermore, educators need to gain appropriation of this language in order to develop security in the educational process involving deaf people.

In face of this, it may be concluded, however, not ended, that the proposal of a bilingual education is in progress and additional researches and investments are needed in order to turn deaf education more assertive and the society may comprehend the use and acquisition process of the language, as well as obtain knowledge about the deaf educational issues.

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